

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
1-24-24

Judges 3

Why God Allowed These Nations To Continue In Israel's Territory – Verses 1-4

¹ These are the nations the LORD left to test all those Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars in Canaan ² (he did this only to teach warfare to the descendants of the Israelites who had not had previous battle experience): ³ the five rulers of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites living in the Lebanon mountains from Mount Baal Hermon to Lebo Hamath. ⁴ They were left to test the Israelites to see whether they would obey the LORD's commands, which he had given their ancestors through Moses.

3:1-4 We learn from chapter 1 that these enemy nations were still in the land because the Israelites had failed to obey God and drive them out. Now God would allow the enemies to remain in order to "test" the Israelites; that is, to give them an opportunity to exercise faith and obedience. By now the younger generation that had not fought in the great battles of conquest was coming of age. It was their job to complete the conquest of the land. There were many obstacles yet to be overcome in their new homeland. How they would handle these obstacles would be a test of their faith. Perhaps God has left obstacles in your life— hostile people, difficult situations, baffling problems— to allow you to develop faith and obedience.

The Apostasy Of Israel In The Days Of Othniel – Verses 5-7

⁵ The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁶ They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods. ⁷ The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs.

3:5-7 The Israelites discovered that relationships affect faith. The men and women of the surrounding nations were attractive to the Israelites. Soon they intermarried, and the Israelites accepted their pagan gods. This was clearly prohibited by God (Exodus 34: 15-17; Deuteronomy 7: 1-4). By accepting these gods into their homes, the Israelites gradually began to accept the immoral practices associated with them. Most Israelites didn't start out determined to be idolaters; they just added the idols to the worship of God. But before long they found themselves absorbed in pagan worship. A similar danger faces us. We want to befriend those who don't know God, but through those friendships we can become entangled in unhealthy practices. Friendships with unbelievers are important, but we must accept people without compromising or adopting their patterns of behavior.

3:7 Baal was the most worshiped god of the Canaanites. Most often cast in the form of a bull, he symbolized strength and fertility and was considered the god of agriculture. Asherah was Baal's female consort, mother goddess of the sea, who was worshiped by means of wooden pillars that substituted for sacred trees. In times of famine, the Canaanites believed Baal was angry with them and was withholding rain as punishment. Archaeologists have uncovered many Baal idols in Israel. It is difficult to imagine the people of Israel trading worship of the Lord for worship of idols of wood, stone, and iron, but we do the same when we forsake worshiping God for other activities, hobbies, or priorities. Our idols are not made of wood or stone, but they are every bit as sinful.

Israel's Servitude To The King Of Mesopotamia – Verse 8

⁸The anger of the LORD burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram Naharaim, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years.

3:8 He sold them into the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia: God gave Israel just what they wanted. They didn't want to serve God, so He allowed them to be in bondage to a pagan king. Israel reaped exactly what they sowed. Eight years: It was many years of bondage before Israel cried out unto the LORD.

God's Deliverance Through Othniel – Verses 9-11

⁹But when they cried out to the LORD, he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, who saved them. ¹⁰The Spirit of the LORD came on him, so that he became Israel's judge and went to war. The LORD gave Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him. ¹¹So the land had peace for forty years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died.

3:9 Othniel was Israel's first judge. In 1:13 we read that he volunteered to lead an attack against a fortified city. Here he was to lead the nation back to God. Othniel had a rich spiritual heritage— his uncle was Caleb, a man with unwavering faith in God (Numbers 13: 30; 14: 24). Othniel's leadership brought the people back to God and freed them from the oppression of the king of Aram Naharaim. But after Othniel's death, it didn't take the Israelites long to fall back into their neighbors' comfortable but sinful ways.

3:10 This phrase, "The Spirit of the LORD came on him," was also spoken of the judges Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson, among others. It expresses a temporary and spontaneous increase of physical, spiritual, or mental strength. This was an extraordinary and supernatural occurrence to prepare a person for a special task. The Holy Spirit is available to all believers today, but he will come upon believers in an extraordinary way for special tasks. We should ask the Holy Spirit's help as we face our daily problems as well as life's major challenges.

The Cycle Continues: Israel Sins And Is Sold Into Servitude – Verses 12-14

¹²Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and because they did this evil the LORD gave Eglon king of Moab power over Israel. ¹³Getting the Ammonites and Amalekites to join him, Eglon came and attacked Israel, and they took possession of the City of Palms. ¹⁴The Israelites were subject to Eglon king of Moab for eighteen years.

3:12 The children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD: After God brought deliverance through the work of Othniel, Israel eventually drifted away from their dependence and obedience towards God. Their victory did not automatically last forever; it had to be maintained.

3:12-13 The Moabites, Ammonites, and Amalekites were nomadic tribes that lived near each other east and southeast of Canaan. These tribes were notorious raiders, possessing great military skill. This was the first time nations outside Canaan attacked the Israelites in their own land.

3:14 The children of Israel served Eglon: Israel's sin brought them into bondage. They suffered 8 years of bondage before they cried out to the LORD in the days of Othniel. Then they endured another 18 stubborn years of bondage before they cried out to the LORD. Sin always brings bondage, though it comes to us deceptively.

God Raises Up A Deliverer Ehud For Israel – Verses 15-19

¹⁵ Again the Israelites cried out to the LORD, and he gave them a deliverer—Ehud, a left-handed man, the son of Gera the Benjamite. The Israelites sent him with tribute to Eglon king of Moab. ¹⁶ Now Ehud had made a double-edged sword about a cubit long, which he strapped to his right thigh under his clothing. ¹⁷ He presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab, who was a very fat man. ¹⁸ After Ehud had presented the tribute, he sent on their way those who had carried it. ¹⁹ But on reaching the stone images near Gilgal he himself went back to Eglon and said, “Your Majesty, I have a secret message for you.” The king said to his attendants, “Leave us!” And they all left.

3:15 This unusual story demonstrates how God can use us just the way he made us. Being left-handed in Ehud’s day was considered an exceptional ability. Many Benjamites were left-handed (see 20: 16), making them highly specialized troops, able to use a sling or bow with tactics designed to repel right-handed warriors. Eglon’s bodyguard never checked Israel’s messengers for left-handed weapons. But God used Ehud’s overlooked ability to give Israel victory. Let God use you the way you are to accomplish his work.

3:15 When the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer. This shows the mercy of God. When Israel repeatedly drifted from God, He had every right to cast them off completely. Yet He still responded when they finally did call on Him for deliverance.

Ehud’s daring assassination of Eglon – Verses 20-26

²⁰ Ehud then approached him while he was sitting alone in the upper room of his palace and said, “I have a message from God for you.” As the king rose from his seat, ²¹ Ehud reached with his left hand, drew the sword from his right thigh and plunged it into the king’s belly. ²² Even the handle sank in after the blade, and his bowels discharged. Ehud did not pull the sword out, and the fat closed in over it. ²³ Then Ehud went out to the porch; he shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them. ²⁴ After he had gone, the servants came and found the doors of the upper room locked. They said, “He must be relieving himself in the inner room of the palace.” ²⁵ They waited to the point of embarrassment, but when he did not open the doors of the room, they took a key and unlocked them. There they saw their lord fallen to the floor, dead. ²⁶ While they waited, Ehud got away. He passed by the stone images and escaped to Seirah.

3:20-21 Ehud reached with his left hand: Because most men fought with their right hand, it wasn’t expected for a man to use his left hand with a dagger or a sword. This shows how cunning Ehud was and how unexpected the strike was to Eglon. The Bible reliably records this incident without giving specific approval of this act of assassination.

Ehud Leads The Israelites In Battle Against The Moabites – Verses 27-30

²⁷ When he arrived there, he blew a trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went down with him from the hills, with him leading them. ²⁸ “Follow me,” he ordered, “for the LORD has given Moab, your enemy, into your hands.” So they followed him down and took possession of the fords of the Jordan that led to Moab; they allowed no one to cross over. ²⁹ At that time they struck down about ten thousand Moabites, all vigorous and strong; not one escaped. ³⁰ That day Moab was made subject to Israel, and the land had peace for eighty years.

3:27 And he led them: As much cunning and courage as Ehud had, he could not do the work by himself. It was essential for brave and faithful men to rally around him. Ehud led, but he had to have followers.

In the same way, God lifts up leaders in the church, but they can't do the work by themselves. The whole body needs to work together.

3:28 Follow me, for the LORD has delivered: Ehud asked the Israelites to follow him, because he was their leader. Yet he also encouraged them to look with faith to the LORD (for the LORD has delivered your enemies into your hand).

3:30 And the land had rest for eighty years: Ehud's cunning and courage, coupled with Israel's faithful following of a leader, brought Israel's longest period of freedom under the 400-year period of the Judges. Ehud is a dramatic example of how in the LORD, one man can make a difference, and how God will call others to work with that one man.

The Brief Story Of Shamgar – Verse 31

³¹ After Ehud came Shamgar son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad. He too saved Israel.

3:31 Shamgar the son of Anath: Shamgar is one of six individuals we call "minor" judges, because not much is written about them. Yet the work they did for God was just as important in their day as anyone else's work.

3:31 He also delivered Israel: To kill 600 Philistines with an oxgoad was quite a feat. An oxgoad was a long stick with a small flat piece of iron on one side and a sharp point on the other. The sharp side was used to drive the oxen during the times of plowing, and the flat end was used to clean the mud off the plow. Eight-foot-long ancient oxgoads have been found. In times of crisis they could easily have been used as spears, as in Shamgar's case. Oxgoads are still used in the Middle East to drive oxen. There was nothing spectacular about an ox goad. But God can use, and wants to use, whatever is in our hands. Shamgar was merely a laborer doing his job; but he took what was in his hand when prompted by God and he rescued the people of God from their enemies.