

EXPOSITION OF JUDGES

Message #4

Judges 3:1-31

When we lived out West, I learned of a man who at one time had packed and ponyed a twenty mule team into Death Valley to the mining camps in order to take them supplies. I learned about this guy's reputation from people I bumped into while in the mountains. He lived in Idaho Falls, which was about fifty miles north of Pocatello. So one day Mary and I drove to his house. I got out of the truck and banged on his door and out he came. He didn't look like much, but he had an aura about him that you knew was real. He didn't have much formal training in a school. He didn't have much of a vocabulary. He didn't know much about science, mathematics, or grammar. But if you were to go into the mountains, this was one man you would love to have with you. He could get you in and out safely. He was in his eighties when I met him and he was still sharp. We talked about the mountains. We talked about survival. We talked about different packing knots. In fact, I asked him about the diamond hitch knot and he asked if I would like to see him tie one. We went to his barn and he had a full mount manikin of a horse. He grabbed a packing cinch with about forty feet of rope, slung it over the horse and he tied it faster than anyone I have ever seen. He knew horses and packing. He had amazing mountaineering skills and knowledge. When you first met him you wouldn't think he was much of anything; but he was the real deal, a real western hero, a man who had been there, seen it, and did it.

That is what we see when we come to this part of the book of Judges. We are about to meet some interesting characters, some of whom initially don't look too impressive. They don't fit a mold. But they love God, they love God's Word and they are willing to obey it, and they become powerful leaders of God. They become real Biblical heroes. There are different kinds of people with different skills, in different situations, who are all used by God to do a job for Him. You'll see some Robin Hood-types and some Rambo-types in these next chapters, but you will also see some average people who didn't have much training but they had faith. They believed God and His Word and they obeyed it, and God did mighty things with them. The one thing we see here is this:

GOD CAN AND WILL USE ANYONE OF ANY BACKGROUND WHO WILL BELIEVE HIM AND HIS WORD AND IS WILLING TO OBEDY IT AND GO TO WAR AGAINST GOD'S ENEMIES.

If you are willing to obey God, you can and will be greatly used by God. You are about to see this in living color. People who don't look like much become amazing servants of God. Now there are five historical realities we want to see in **Judges 3**:

HISTORICAL REALITY #1 – God permitted enemies to exist for His purposes. **3:1-4**

God has a reason for everything He does and everything He permits. He has sovereign purposes behind everything. Sometimes we can figure it out and sometimes we cannot.

In **verse 3**, there are four specific enemies that are named that God permitted to exist:

- 1) The Philistines - big, strong and intimidating enemies - they controlled the Promised Land to the southwest. These Philistines give Israel the most trouble in later days of Judges.
- 2) The Canaanites - the civilized enemies who loved the arts and sciences - they controlled the Promised Land in the southeast.
- 3) The Sidonians - the skilled, successful workmen - they controlled the Promised Land in the northwest.
- 4) The Hivites - the diplomatic pacifists who didn't like war - they controlled the Promised Land in the northeast.

God says I allowed these enemies to exist, and primarily there are two stated purposes why God permitted certain enemies to exist:

Purpose #1 - The purpose of war. **3:1-2**

God never wanted Israel to lose sight of the discipline and action needed for victory. Israel needed to understand that God expected her to go into her land and trust Him and go to war against the enemies and get them out of there. Those enemies became the means whereby they could trust God and see God do great things. I like what one commentator said back in 1923, "God left a remnant of . . . nations to prevent His people from growing rusty" (George Bush, *Critical and Practical Notes On the Book of Judges*, p. 29).

We need to grasp this point; we are at war and we are to wage war for God in this world. We are supposed to wage war against our enemies (world, Devil, flesh) and see God give us great victory. One reason why God permits these enemies to exist is so that we can see Him work. Spiritually speaking, we are not on friendly terms with this world. We are in a holy war against an evil world. **God wants us good warriors, not cowardly wimps.**

There is certainly a common denominator among all of the judges mentioned in this chapter - they were all courageous warriors. This book of Judges teaches us that we need to be good, God-honoring warriors and what that actually means is that **we take stands and risks for God and we trust God.**

Purpose #2 - The purpose of testing. **3:1-4**

The real purpose of testing is trusting. God wanted to know if His people loved Him enough and believed in Him enough to take a stand for Him. God wants people who trust Him and His Word. He kept some of the enemies around to see whether or not His people would turn to Him, trust Him, and obey Him. The sad reality for Israel is that it didn't matter what the test; for the most part, God's people kept failing. Over and over again God's people kept being defeated. They quit fighting a good fight and waging a good war and at times seemed to give up. They failed their tests over and over again. You would think that after suffering so many humiliating defeats they would finally say, we need to change. But God's people didn't. They kept failing over and over again.

Probably all of us have asked God to take away some enemy that plagues our spiritual life. We have at times experienced the humiliation of failure, and we hate that experience so we ask God to take the enemy away. What we discover is that it doesn't seem to fully go away and every now and then can become a thorn in our side. God will keep running the tests until we get it right. When we do get it right, we will go on to greater levels of peace and blessings.

HISTORICAL REALITY #2 – God's people did not defeat enemies but were influenced by them. **3:5-6**

In **verse 5**, God adds four more nations to the list of enemies who influenced Israel, other than the ones mentioned in **verse 3**: 1) The Hittites - big business commercial people; 2) The Amorites - people always wanting peace; 3) The Perizzites - rural type of people; 4) The Jebusites - people who loved to be left alone in the high country.

Now some of these people that God permitted to exist among His people weren't all bad. In fact, they were so congenial that they lured God's people into thinking they were all one big happy worldly family. There are three ways God's people were influenced:

(Influence Way #1) - They lived among these worldly people. **3:5**

Instead of driving them out of the land, they chose to live with them in the land.

(Influence Way #2) - They intermarried with these worldly people. **3:6a**

This was a direct violation of a commandment of God (Deuteronomy 7:1-5; Joshua 23:12).

(Influence Way #3) - They served the gods of the worldly people. **3:6b**

It is one thing to marry an unsaved person; it is quite another to get involved in their false worship.

God's people turned their backs on God and they "threw themselves into the pagan, sensual worship of the Canaanite gods" (Gary Inrig, *Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay*, p. 45).

When we choose to be unequally yoked with unbelievers, there is much more biblical evidence that suggests the bad will corrupt the good rather than the good will reform the bad.

HISTORICAL REALITY #3 – God's people did evil in God's sight and angered God. **3:7-8**

This is as bad as it gets. These people turned their backs on God, forgot God, and served immoral idols. You would think God would get so fed up with His people that He would just wipe them all out. But God is a compassionate God to His people, and He allowed them to come under the rule of a king whose name was Cushan-rishathaim.

Not much is known about this king, but the name “Rishathaim” means double wickedness. This would suggest that he was a cruel and powerful king who kept Israel in bondage for eight years. It is known that God’s people were often subjected to very severe and cruel treatment.

Keep in mind that this is all sovereignly permitted and orchestrated by God for His purpose, which is to get His people to cry out to Him and turn back to Him and His Word.

When we turn away from God and His Word, we are heading to a God-ordained disaster.

HISTORICAL REALITY #4 – God’s people cry to God for help. **3:9**

God sovereignly backed His people into a corner; and one of the purposes of it was to get His people to finally turn back to Him for help, and finally, after eight years of misery, God’s people cried out to God for help.

That is all you need to do if your life is a total disaster and mess - just turn to God and cry to Him for help. That is what He is waiting for you to do.

HISTORICAL REALITY #5 – God raises up His judge-leaders to deliver His people.
3:9b-31

The Hebrew verb “raises up” is in the Hiphil stem, which emphasizes that God is the cause of this action. The word actually means that God causes a leader to exist and to come forth and rise up and stand in order to help deliver His people (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 728). God has help waiting for you and all you need to do is cry out to Him for help and He will put His plan in motion. There were three judge-leaders He raised up:

Judge Leader #1 - God raises up Othniel. **3:9-11**

Othniel first shows up in Scripture in Joshua 15. He was the son of Kenaz and the brother of Caleb (Joshua 15:17). Caleb said that he would give his daughter to the one who attacked and captured Kiriath-sepher and Othniel did just that (Judges 1:11-15).

(Trait #1) - Othniel did come from a solid family background.

Othniel comes from the right side of the tracks.

(Trait #2) - Othniel was a man of proven ability.

He was not some novice. He was a man of valor. He had proven himself in war. He was very skilled.

(Trait #3) - Othniel was a man of great courage and reputation.

He went up against the city of Debir, the city of books and learning, and captured it. He was fearless and he had earned a good reputation with his countryman and married Caleb’s daughter.

(Trait #4) - Othniel was a man of personal faith .

This was Othniel's background; but notice the thing that made him so powerful and so usable and successful - "the Spirit of the LORD came upon him" (Judges 3:10). God gave him the ability to minister for Him. He went up against the Mesopotamian evil king and he won.

According to **verse 11**, God gave Israel peace for forty years. Maybe your life has been a disaster for eight years. Why not cry out to God and ask Him for help, and peace and blessing will be yours again. When we turn to God and obey God and get evil out of our lives, there is a great peace and joy and blessing that is ours. But then we read Othniel died.

Judge Leader #2 - God raises up Ehud. **3:12-30**

As soon as Othniel was gone, evil came back. Stop judging things and it won't take long to find yourself right back in the same rut. So God strengthened a Moabite king to come against His people whose name was Eglon, and he was a guy with many serious problems.

Now keep in mind God sovereignly permits this guy to become a real problem for Israel. When you look at **verses 12-17**, whenever the name "Eglon" is mentioned, it is also mentioned that he is the Moabite king. This would seem to suggest that he was somewhat of an egomaniac. He was a very greedy man and he was a very undisciplined man. But God would use him.

God permitted Eglon to gather neighboring tribes to form an alliance with the sons of Ammon and Amalek, and he defeated Israel and took over "the city of the palm trees" which was located somewhere near the ancient site of Jericho (Deuteronomy 34:3; **Judges 3:12-14**) near Gilgal (**3:19**). He dominated Israel for eighteen years, and finally Israel cried to the Lord for help (**3:15**) and God raised up Ehud.

God sees us when we are sinking. God will appear to be far off until we turn to Him for help. When you reach the bottom and finally cry out to God and turn back to Him, you will see Him work. God raised up Ehud. There are five key traits we want to see:

(Trait #1) - Ehud was a prominent man and a trusted man. **3:15**

He was a trusted Benjamite who was responsible and trusted to take all the tax money to the king.

(Trait #2) - Ehud was handicapped in his right hand so he was left-handed. **3:15**

The actual Hebrew indicates that there was something physically wrong with Ehud's right hand. The Hebrew literally reads "a man whose right hand was bound." The Hebrew word "bound" is one that means his right hand was impeded, shut down so he learned to use his left hand (Gesenius, p. 35). This is about the last guy you would think would become a champion warrior. He has a physical handicap. But physical handicaps are nothing for God. Emotional handicaps are nothing for God. Spiritual handicaps are nothing for God. God can make any person with any handicap His champion. You trust God and obey God and you'll be greatly used. He did that here with Ehud.

(Trait #3) - Ehud was a courageous man and careful strategist. **3:16-22**

Ehud had a plan to assassinate the Moabite king Eglon, who was making life so difficult for Israel. We must assume since God raises him up that this is not some self-induced impulse of a patriotic man, but this is a strategy laid on his heart and mind by God. Here was his plan:

- 1) Ehud made himself a sword. **3:16a** - This was no easy task for a man with one hand.
- 2) Ehud hid a sword under his coat strapped to his right thigh. **3:16b** - It is easier to draw a weapon from the opposite side so Ehud concealed his weapon on his right thigh which makes it easier to draw with your left hand.
- 3) Ehud presents the money to the king. **3:17**
- 4) Eglon dismisses all other witnesses. **3:18** - Lots of people brought the money.
- 5) Ehud tells the king he had a secret message to give him from God. **3:19-20** - He figured out a way to get a private meeting by telling him that he had a secret message. Eglon was sitting privately in his cool roof chamber when Ehud went to him.
- 6) Ehud takes the sword and thrusts it into Eglon's belly. **3:21-22**

The results are graphically described. Eglon was so fat that the handle of the knife closed over the blade and excrement was released from his bowels and came out on the floor. What is also amazing is that Eglon did not cry out in pain. There was no groaning or shrieking.

(Trait #4) - Ehud was a calm controlled man with a strong confidence in God. **3:23-26**

Keep in mind this is a guy with a physical handicap. Ehud did not panic. He kept his emotions in check. He stayed cool and calm. He carefully and calmly shut and locked the doors (**verse 23**) and slipped away. He had obviously carefully organized an escape plan, which many have speculated was to go out through the sewer system. It is possible that he locked the doors shut from the inside and made his escape. Or he may have taken the keys and locked the door shut from the outside and calmly walked away. But regardless, this is a calm man under pressure because God had given him this serenity.

(Trait #5) - Ehud was a God-glorifying man. **3:28-30**

I love what Ehud did. He carried out this mission on his own. But he does not go back and take credit for this amazing assassination. He simply goes back and says God has given us victory, now go take out the Moabites.

Some Navy Seals of our military just completed an impressive mission of killing Osama Bin Laden. What an impressive thing it would have been if the President of the United States had said, God has given us this victory and now let's turn the tide on all Arab enemies and run them out of the United States. Of course, that would not be the politically correct thing to say or do. Politicians want the glory and they don't give it to God.

But this episode brought peace to Israel for eighty years. They controlled the Jordan area and enjoyed God's blessings for eighty years.

Judge Leader #3 - God raises up Shamgar. **3:31**

We don't know much about this guy. He is mentioned again in Judges 5:6. The words "after him" refer to after Ehud. There are four main traits brought out about Shamgar:

(Trait #1) - Shamgar comes from a very obscure family background.

We know nothing about his family background and the name "Anath" is not a Hebrew name. In fact, the name "Anath" was the name of a Canaanite goddess of war. So Shamgar was not your typical Jewish boy raised in a nice religious home and given a nice Jewish name.

(Trait #2) - Shamgar was a peasant farmer.

The oxgoad was a long pole about eight to ten feet made of wood with metal tips on both ends. One end was a metal spike used for prodding the oxen, and the other end was like a chisel that could actually plow the ground. One commentator said some of the most distinguished men and women of God have come from very poor backgrounds. What any person really needs to become a great success is a relationship with God. Nobodies become somebodies in the hand of God.

(Trait #3) - Shamgar was skilled with the primitive tools he had.

He knew how to fight with this oxgoad. Here is a very important point to see - no matter how weak the person or weapon may appear to be, God can greatly use it for His purposes.

(Trait #4) - Shamgar was a courageous man.

He was not afraid to fight six hundred Philistines. We don't know much about this. It is possible that he was out farming and saw the Philistines coming into the land and took them all on.

There are some believers who think that they cannot be used for God because they do not fit a mold. Well you are about to meet some judges who do not fit any mold. Each judge has a different personality, different abilities, and different ministries. Never is that more obvious than when we meet our first three leaders.

Perhaps you have been lacking victory, blessings, and peace for years. Will you turn to the Lord? Will you cry out to Him? If you will, no matter what your background, God will powerfully change your life.