

Lessons From the Lives of the Judges

OTHNIEL – THE LION OF GOD

(PT. 1)

JUDGES 3:1-11

Text:

Introduction:

The period addressed in the book of Judges is a period of time defined by lawlessness, rebellion and moral failure among the people of Israel.

This time is summarized in Judges 17:6 and 21:25.

Judges 17:6

⁶ In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

Judges 21:25

²⁵ In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.

This is a pretty good description of our day as well.

God had redeemed Israel from Egyptian bondage. He led them for forty years through a wilderness. He brought them safely into the land of Canaan and

promised to defeat all their enemies, if only they would walk with Him in holiness.

God commanded them to enter Canaan and to conquer it, Deuteronomy 7:1-6. The commandments given in those verses are crystal clear.

Deuteronomy 7:1-6

¹ When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; ² And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: ³ Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. ⁴ For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. ⁵ But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire. ⁶ For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.

They were to:

- Possess the Land (vs. 1)
- Utterly destroy all the nations of Canaan (vs. 2)
- They were to make no covenant with them (vs. 2)
- They were not to show them any mercy (vs. 2)
- They were not to marry them (vs. 3)
- They were to completely destroy every trace of their pagan religions (vs. 5)

The reason they were commanded to do this was because Israel was to be different from all the people around them, Deuteronomy 7:6.

God demanded total separation among His people. He knew that if Israel allowed themselves to be entangled with the Canaanites, they would become corrupt spiritually and be drawn away from God, Deuteronomy 7:4.

Israel had their instructions, but they failed to carry out fully the Lord's command. The record of their failure is chronicled in Judges 1:19-34.

- Judah Failed (Jud. 1:19-20)
- Benjamin Failed (Jud. 1:21)
- Joseph Failed (Jud. 1:22-26)
- Manasseh Failed (Jud. 1:27-28)
- Ephraim Failed (Jud. 1:29)
- Zebulun Failed (Jud. 1:30)
- Asher Failed (Jud. 1:31-32)
- Naphtali Failed (Jud. 1:33)
- Dan Failed (Jud. 1:34)
- The tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh even refused to enter Canaan, choosing to remain on the other side of Jordan.

Israel's failure to defeat their enemies resulted in them living among their enemies. After a while, they became like their enemies, adopting the wicked ways of the various Canaanite tribes around them. Eventually,

Israel began to worship the false gods of the Canaanites. When they followed this downward path, God allowed them to know His displeasure and His judgment.

When judgment came, eventually the people would realize that they were to blame. They would repent and seek the Lord. When they did, God forgave them and raised up a deliverer, called a Judge. These men and women helped Israel throw off the yoke of their oppressors. They also helped them to live for God.

Israel would follow a Judge until that Judge died, then they would revert to their wicked ways and the cycle would begin again. This continued in Israel for about 400 years, until they got their first king.

As we look at these men and women God used to deliver His people in those days, I want you to see that He is still looking for men and women He can use in our day. God is no longer looking for judges, but He is looking for leaders.

Today we will look at the first Judge whose name is Othniel.

His name means “The Lion of God.

He was a man who lived up to his name.

Because Israel refused to walk with the Lord like He commanded them to, He refused to drive out all their enemies in the land of Canaan. Thus, Israel was forced to live alongside the very people they had been sent to destroy.

We are told in verses 1-4 exactly why God left the people in the land.

Judges 3:1-4

¹ Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, even as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan; ² Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof; ³ Namely, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baalhermon unto the entering in of Hamath. ⁴ And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.

Note at His reasons:

- He left them there to prove Israel (vs. 1)

The word “prove” means “to put to the test”. God allowed the pagans to live around His people to test Israel.

His people were tested to see how they would live when surrounded by the wicked. His people were tested to see if they would keep His commandments or not, v. 4. They failed this test!

- He left them there to teach new generations about spiritual warfare (vs. 2)

God wanted them to learn the lessons of battle their fathers had known. God wanted them to be strong and to know how to fight the enemy when he came around. They failed this test too!

It wasn't long until this caused some serious problems among the people of Israel. Israel proved that they could not be trusted to stand up against the enemy. They proved that they would rather join the enemy than fight them.

Notice how God delivered Israel from a time of cruel bondage by raising up Othniel: The Lion of God.

1. ISRAEL'S COMPROMISE (VS. 5-7)

Judges 3:5-7

⁵ And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites: ⁶ And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods. ⁷ And the children of Israel

did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves.

These verses give us the ugly details of Israel's first great failure. What they did stands as a warning to the people of God in any age. What Israel did then is what we see people doing all around us today. Notice how they compromised the Word of God and the will of God to do the things they wanted to do.

A. Interaction With the Canaanites (vs. 5)

Judges 3:5

⁵ And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites:

The word "dwelt" has the idea "of settling down; of setting up housekeeping".

When Israel arrived in Canaan they were commanded to destroy these people without mercy, not they are living among them. It took a very short time for their former enemies to become their new neighbors.

B. Intermarriage With the Canaanites (vs. 6a)

Judges 3:6

⁶ And they took their daughters to be their wives, and

gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

After a while, the people of Israel got so used to living among the Canaanites that they began to intermarry with them. This was expressly forbidden by the Lord. It was pure disobedience on their part.

As they married into the tribes around them, the Israelites began to lose their national identity. The very integrity of their families began to break down. They soon lost the very thing that made them unique.

The same danger confronts us today. When we get too close to the world around us, we will soon find ourselves entangled with them in their sins. The company you keep will determine how close you walk to the Lord.

C. Idolatry With the Canaanites (vs. 6b, 7b)

Judges 3:6-7

⁶ And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods. ⁷ And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves.

D. Indifference With Canaanites (vs. 7a)

Judges 3:7

⁷ And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves.

Each step they took led them farther away from God. Each step they took away from Him led them down a pathway toward totally abandoning Him and His ways.

Verse 7 tells us they forgot the Lord.

The word “forgot” means “to ignore, or to cease to care”. The people of Israel reached a place where they simply ignored God and ceased to care about Him or what He had to say about anything. They reached a place of total indifference toward the Lord.

That is where many in our day have come to! Most folk know the Lord is there. They know that His Word has something to say to them about their lives and how they live them. They know God as a claim on their lives, but they choose to ignore Him. He is there, but they aren't listening. He calls, but they don't come. They harden their hearts against God, His Word and the call of the Spirit of God. They turn a deaf ear to Him and His call on their lives. As far as they are concerned, God doesn't matter, and He might as well not even exist! That is a dangerous place to be!

Next week we will consider Israel's Chastisement, and Israel's Champion.