

The Book of Judges

Lesson 5 - Chapter 3

Last week in Judges chapter 2 the Lord told Israel that as a result of their blatant idolatry (that was both a cause and an effect from their refusal to obey Yehoveh's instructions to drive out or kill all the inhabitants of Canaan) He would allow many of those pagan nations to stay rooted in the land and be a thorn for Israel. This was a punishment that was also a trial for Israel; and the trial was not in the sense of being a difficulty that they had to endure but rather it was a judicial trial that would be held in God's heavenly courtroom. He would look at the evidence (their behavior) and acquit or convict based on whether they followed His commands while mired in the severe conditions they found themselves in. Acquittal meant peace and rest and security in the Promised Land; conviction meant removal from the Promised Land. But as I said last week, in no ways were Israel (past, present or future) ever to think that because God severely punished His people that this was to be interpreted as Him revoking, abolishing, changing, replacing or otherwise breaking His covenant.

We're going to find that the Book of Judges is simply packed with powerful expressions and principles that will cause us to go slowly and carefully through each verse, else we will blow right by and miss the impact. And that impact is so relevant to us, the contemporary Body of Believers, that I truly believe that the Book of Judges ought to be undertaken as a Church-wide study, maybe as a launching point for a true revival. I see this book as a timely clarion call similar to the ones brought to God's people by the likes of Isaiah and Hosea, Jeremiah and Zechariah. A clarion call that resulted in these prophets being met with ridicule, persecution, and told that essentially they were spoil-sports who brought messages of gloom that no one wanted to hear. After all, Israel was the redeemed of God. What else mattered?

I will tell you frankly that the Book of Judges is difficult for me to teach because it is such an extended time of depravity and darkness for God's people; most pastors and teachers for that very reason usually avoid this book. They and I well recognize that you can all rather easily turn-off to a weekly series of disasters, and failures, and doom, and dire warnings because to be uplifted and given hope is what we all seek in the deepest reaches of our souls. Over and over as I study, and even when I'm trying to sleep, I keep hearing (like an unrelenting ringing in my ears from being too close to loud noise) this still small voice asking, "Do you have eyes to see, and ears to listen?" So I merely pass that question along to you, as I wrestle with it in my own life.

There is hope in Judges but it is an implied hope; a hope for a better future after a long and catastrophic time of people doing what is right in their own eyes and therefore by definition being out of the will of God at their own choice. The hope is for revival and regeneration; the hope is for God's people to awaken from their self-imposed delusions.

Here in Judges chapter 3 we will see the first 3 **Shofetim** (Shophetim, Judges) presented to us. And we'll see how they are characterized as imperfect saviors, but saviors nonetheless. We'll see that even when followers of the God of Israel go far astray that the Lord not only leaves the door open for their return as did the father of the prodigal son but that Yehoveh pursues them as the father of the prodigal son did NOT. That the Lord so loves His people that **He has pity** on them even when they are in the midst of heinous trespasses against Him, depravity offered up as sacrifices to Him, and is behaving as a people without shame reveling in their adulterous affairs with other gods. If the hope that God saves and forgives when His people repent isn't hope for you, for us, I don't know what is.

So I ask you to do something that Believers aren't asked to do very much: be sober of mind at the same time you are joyful for your status with God through Christ. Hear the hard things, the stinging things that the Lord has to say to you even though it may not be what you want to hear, or what is easy to hear.

Let's read Judges chapter 3.

READ JUDGES CHAPTER 3 all

Experientially speaking the current generation of the 12 tribes did not know the Holy War fought by their fathers and grandfathers in order to settle this Land of Canaan, thus they possessed an indifferent and naïve attitude about how they arrived at their current relatively peaceful and easy situation.

To be fair Joshua and his generation (and the younger one that he led into battle) also went through a learning process; they listened to God and obeyed and thus Jericho literally fell into their hands. But then almost immediately they felt all-full of themselves and decided to go to battle against the residents of Ai according their own strategies and might and were soundly defeated. After their loss they realized their error, repented, and then under the Lord's leadership they again attacked Ai and this time won.

So while we can certainly see that this new generation of Hebrews in Canaan who were the beneficiaries of their parents' sacrifices and courage ought to have taken advantage of the hard lessons of history, they did what almost all new generations do: feel that the things of the past have no relevance to them. Therefore the Lord was going to force them to experience war in order to learn HOW Holy War was to be fought. And lesson number one was that the Lord only aids Israel when they are obedient and devoted to Him.

Israel in our day, as during the time of the Judges, is like that new generation who does not realize that they are fighting a Holy War; they see little if any relevance to their ancient heritage as connected with current events, and they only see their struggles with the Palestinians and a myriad of disparate terrorist groups as a series of battles and tests of will, fought in a modern world within a framework of global geo-politics and local personal power agendas, with each battle having its own reason and outcome.

The modern Israeli government and people can not seem to grasp that just as it was after Joshua's death there remains a **divine purpose** for Israel to possess Canaan, not simply the normal and never-ending struggles for national and tribal dominance that will continue among men the world over until Messiah returns to put an end to it.

Holy War is unlike any other kind of war. True Holy War is NOT declared by men it is ordained by God. There has been, and will always be, only ONE Holy War and the first arrow shot in anger to signal its beginning was in Joshua's era. Islamic Jihad is NOT Holy War, its merely another of many religious and cultural wars mankind's history records. So Holy War is not war fought under a veneer of religious fervor and the outcome decided by the strongest and best armed. Holy War is a God-initiated, God-led battle that has not only divine purpose but must be fought according to well-defined divine rules and principles. And the reason for this is because the outcome is not the issue, because the outcome has been decided since eternity past. Rather it is the PROCESS that is everything; it is the experience that we gain as Yehoveh's Holy Warriors whereby we learn who God is that matters.

The Holy War rules of engagement are primarily stated in the Law of Herem, the Law of the Ban, that we studied in much earlier lessons on the Torah and on the Book of Joshua. Frankly the Lord's Holy War rules don't look much like the Geneva Convention, nor do they look much like the humanitarian philosophies that Israel operates under in dealing with their ongoing fight for survival. Holy War doesn't involve peace treaties, or prisoner swaps, or attempting to minimize damage to enemy cities. Rather it involves the positive identification of evil and then its total eradication of those who embrace it; not through diplomacy and re-education but through destruction. Holy War does not end at a treaty table; it ends when God's people join Him in total obedience and evil exists no more.

Folks, underneath all of this is something that verse 2 states so succinctly and it applies to all who call upon the name of the Lord whether Jew or gentile, in any generation past or future: the Lord will see to it that we, His devoted followers, His earthly army, are FORCED to learn the art of war. And when I say war I mean spiritual war; war that even though it begins with prayer it most definitely involves physical acts, willful decisions, hard and perhaps dangerous work, and at times great personal sacrifice.

I'm not saying anything you haven't heard from countless pastors and evangelists, that as Believers of the God of Israel the context of our lives is actually played out in the heavenlies even though it is largely invisible to us; it only seems to be a physical earthly struggle. But what you may not hear quite as often is that it is the Lord's will that every single one who makes the choice to serve Him will be drafted into His army. You WILL face battle; you WILL experience war. No exceptions. Each soldier is destined for the front. There are no cooks and orderlies to whom God assigns cushy jobs that keep them far away from the conflict and safe; there's only those who accept that they ARE in state of war, they are God's Holy Warriors, and so put on the full armor of God and engage the enemy, and those who deny it and thus shrink away in constant fear or defeat.

Let me say that again: as Believers we are destined for warfare as much as we are destined for Heaven; to two go hand in hand. Holy War is our job. God has created us, saved us, and

separated us away from those marked for destruction for that purpose. The only question is, will you allow yourself to be trained and used effectively; will you don your battle gear, follow orders and face the enemy, or will you refuse to serve and hide thinking you can avoid the effort and danger?

Israel at the time of the Judges generally chose the latter, and so figured they would rather compromise and make peace than continue the war. The consequence was that God told Israel that they can try as they might to make peace, but that HE will cause their peace to fail. The thing is that God had a nearly endless supply of people (the Canaanites) to harass Israel, and He didn't hesitate to use them. He still doesn't.

Verse 3 begins a list of the various nations that God allowed to stay in Israel to be a constant source of trouble. The 5 princes of the Philistines are referring to 5 Philistine kings who ruled over 5 city-states located along the Mediterranean coast. Then of course there were the Canaanites who are direct descendants of Canaan and then other less distinct groups of people who lived in the Land of Canaan and were thus given that general title. In addition were the inhabitants of the city-state of Sidon, a great and powerful people who resided along the northern coast, and the Hivites who lived in the northern hill country of Canaan. What we get a picture of is that these people who were ordained by Yehoveh to stay in the land dotted the land from south to north, and east to west, like craters on the moon. There would be no Israelite tribe and no clan of any tribe that wouldn't be contending with gentiles sooner than later.

The results of all this were not only predictable but divinely ordained. So verse 7 now sets the stage for the entrance of the first Judge of Israel; it says that the people of Israel did what was evil FROM ADONAI'S PERSPECTIVE. Oh, my, what an important little phrase that is in the middle of that sentence. It was NOT from Israel's perspective that they were doing evil but it sure was from God's. I could probably take several minutes to outline examples of the many questionable actions and attitudes that some Christians and some entire denominations have adopted that is so far from Scriptural instruction that one wonders how it ever came about. But instead, I'll rather merely point out that from their own perspective they are doing nothing wrong or evil or they wouldn't be doing it. The Israelites of the Judges era felt the same and we are going to have several illustrations of that attitude over the next few chapters. In the end, however, God didn't buy their rationalizations and excuses nor accept their denials. Disobedience is disobedience, whether from willful ignorance of the Law or from willful intention to violate it. He has given them a manual for living a redeemed lifestyle in the Torah, told them to use it, and they have chosen instead to incorporate some of their own ideas and to disregard many of God's commands. But at the bottom of it all was idolatry; Israel adopted some the Canaanite gods into their worship practices.

Thus in time the result of the Lord's anger against them was that a ruler came down and subjugated parts of Israel; his name was ***Kushan-Rish'atayim***. ***Kushan*** means Cush, meaning that this king was a descendant of Cush and very probably also a black man. It is said by most scholars that this man came from an area near the Euphrates River. Now this name for him is Hebrew, so it could not have been this king's actual foreign name. Rather it is a title that roughly translated means, "the double-wicked Cushite", which of course is how those

Israelite tribes that were conquered by his armies were bound to see him.

Now comes an interesting problem: **Kushan Rish'atayim** conquered the **southern** tribal areas of Israel even though we are told in verse 8 that he was from **Aram-Naharayim**. Aram is located far to the north; so ostensibly what we have is that 1) Kushan was a northerner, 2) he was a Cushite, but 3) attacked the southern Israelite tribes; that doesn't make much sense. Why he would have led his army all that way only to attack the southern tribes defies any known political or military agenda. What we have to understand when reading these historical accounts is that there are REASONS that one nation attacked another just like it is our day. Whether it was food, precious metals, or simply a desire to expand their empire, there was logic behind their decisions to go to war.

However what we find is that Jewish scholars have long known that the words Aram and Edom are often transposed in the Bible; it's rather common actually. Why? Because Aram is spelled in Hebrew **Reysh-Mem**, and Edom is spelled **Dalet-Mem** and a Reysh and a Dalet look nearly identical and they were a regular copyist error. Therefore it's more certain than speculation that **Kushan** was actually from the area of Edom, which was where the Cushites were known to live and Edom was located in the southern desert areas adjacent to the southern Israelite tribes.

So now we have the first part of the God-pattern for the era of the Judges established; a pattern that we'll see all throughout the Book of Judges. First the people sin (idolatry in this case), second the Lord declares them guilty and punishes them with oppression by a gentile nation. Next is what happens in verse 9: the people of Israel cry out to God to save them from the oppression; fourth God has pity and in turn raises up a savior to rescue them. The Hebrew word for this savior is a familiar sounding one: **yahshah**. The word Yehoshua (Yeshua) sounds so similar because they're from the same root word. The Book of Judges refers to these saviors in general as **Shopetim**, judges, but their initial purpose is to save, to rescue. Only later after rescuing some Israelite tribe or another (again, generally speaking) do they at times turn into magistrates and sources of wisdom. And the first Judge raised up is a logical choice: **Othniel**, younger brother of **Kalev**, and husband to Caleb's daughter **Akhsah**. I say logical because it was this same man who won the hill country of the south from some Anakim descendants as a challenge from his older brother, with **Akhsah** as the prize. Why would **Akhsah** be such an attraction for Othniel? Was it her beauty or charm? Hardly. Understand: from a clan perspective, the brother next in line in the Caleb clan who then marries the clan chief's daughter, makes it a lead pipe cinch that **Othniel** would eventually become the new clan leader; thus the reward was worth the risk. Further it is equally as obvious that the warrior leader **Othniel** must have been considerably younger than Caleb, who was one of the 12 spies sent out by Moses so many years earlier, otherwise he would not have been able to personally lead the troops in battle.

Now in verse 10 we get a statement that sounds simple enough, but it opens up many questions and not a small dilemma. The statement is: **"The spirit of YHWH came upon him (Othniel) and he judged Israel"**. As we have discussed on numerous occasions there is perhaps no more difficult person or essence or manifestation of the Godhead to describe than the Holy Spirit. And we also have this equally difficult challenge of trying to understand what, if

any, difference there is between the concepts of the Holy Spirit being UPON someone versus the Holy Spirit being AROUND someone versus the Holy Spirit DWELLING IN someone. Let's talk about that for a few minutes.

Although we often skip right over it to seemingly greater theological issues, fundamental to our understanding ought to be an answer to the question: what IS the Spirit of God and what does He do? The Spirit of God is the spiritual essence or spiritual mechanism that creates or introduces **life** both into the world of nature and into the human being. For humans there are two discernable aspects of the work of the spirit: first is this kind of life spark that is given to cause general physical human life by means of the normal birth process and then our continuing existence and operation in the physical realm. The second aspect of the work of the spirit in humans is that it provides a means of **eternal life** for operation of our spiritual souls in the spiritual realm and it occurs only by divine declaration. One could make the case that for mankind the Spirit of Yehoveh first enables GENERATION of life (pregnancy and childbirth) and then enables **RE-GENERATION** of a higher life for a select group.

Now follow me because I think this is not just for scholars or pastors to understand. Particularly in the Old Testament the Spirit of YHWH is a spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and strength, and of the proper fear and awe and knowledge of the Lord. In Judges the Spirit of God is usually an enabling power; a power given or loaned to a human to carry out a special assignment of heavenly purpose and by means of heavenly direction that otherwise could not be done or at least it would not produce an outcome that is in harmony with the will of God if it were merely a humanly directed endeavor.

The expression, "The Spirit of YHWH came upon (or befell) him" indicates a supernatural and extraordinary influence of God's spirit upon the human spirit. It is something that only a handful of people in the OT era would ever experience. However this isn't all that nice and neat for there is yet another expression of the work of the Holy Spirit upon men that we'll find in Judges chapter 6. In Judges 6:34 we find that: "**the Spirit of ADONAI covered Gid'on**".

And indeed there is an entirely different Hebrew word used in Judges 3:10 than in Judges 6:34 to characterize how it is that the Spirit of God communicated or interacted or influenced a human. In Judges 3:10 the word used is **hayyah**. **Hayyah** is a rather general term that, depending on its form and context can mean, "became", or "come to pass", or even "befall". On the other hand in Judges 6:34 where we're told that the Holy Spirit **covered** Gideon, the word is **labesh** and it usually means to wear something like a garment, or something that is put on like an article of clothing or a blanket. And it is hard not to see that an entirely different word picture is drawn for us between the idea of the Holy Spirit befalling or coming upon a man, and the Lord clothing a man or covering him in the Holy Spirit like a full length robe.

When we peel that onion back another layer we see evidence that when the Holy Spirit **hayyah**, comes upon, a man it operates in a manner to overcome the resistance of the man's own natural free will such that it is God's will that replaces it; while the second (and probably DIFFERENT) concept of the Holy Spirit covering or clothing (**labesh**) a human so fully envelopes that person that the person becomes endowed with the ability to perform miraculous deeds including the ability to prophesy, or to perform works that far surpass the human nature

from both a courage or physical strength standpoint. It was especially this ability to perform bravely in the face of humanly impossible odds against him, or showing equally impossible strength and battlefield skill that most of the **Shophetim** displayed.

I'm not going to go much further because once we enter the New Testament we have nothing but Greek texts available and precise word comparisons between OT Hebrew terms and NT Greek terms become very difficult, and especially so when it comes to trying to determine what exactly is the difference between the Holy Spirit upon, the Holy spirit enveloping, and the Holy Spirit indwelling. One thing that we do know: the outcome of a Believer in Messiah being indwelt of the Holy Spirit since the Shavuot (Pentecost) immediately following Yeshua's death and resurrection is that something fundamental about our souls and spirit nature changes such that we qualify to live eternally in the presence of a Holy God. Such was definitely **not** the case with the Judges or Prophets; so far as we know upon death they dwelled in a specially prepared earthly chamber that at some point came to be called Abraham's Bosom and this was their temporary spiritual residence (a short term paradise) until Christ gave them the good news that because of His work they were now free to leave that chamber to go live with God.

Othniel, with the Spirit of God UPON him, went to war with **Kushan-Rish'atayim** of Edom to try and eject him and his army from the areas of Judah and southernmost Ephraim; **Othniel** (meaning lion of God) prevailed and the area of the Promised Land under his jurisdiction had rest from oppression for 40 years. That period of rest ended upon the death of **Othniel**. And typically that is also part of the pattern that a Judge will be raised up and be a Judge until his death; and that all during his life as a **Shophet** he will be victorious against gentile enemies.

Now we come to the final part of the pattern or cycle of the Judges in verse 12: even after deliverance Israel rebels again and God judges them as doing evil. I think it is significant that sufficient time passes that at least one, and often two, generations are produced after the primary victory of a Judge. And it is the NEW generation who, after the death of that Judge, did not experience war or participate in battle and so apostizes and causes the next cycle of sin, oppression, punishment, raising up a new Judge, and deliverance to begin.

Although verse 12 doesn't tell us precisely what the evil was that this new generation of Israel committed, you can bet that idolatry was at its core because invariably idolatry played a starring role in all of Israel's apostasies. Let me remind you of something we talked about last week: apostizing does NOT mean that the people necessarily renounced Yehoveh. Rather they broke faith with Him by mixing the worship of other gods with worship of Him. You see, I think something that is going to have to fundamentally change in the minds and hearts of we modern Believers is that our behavior plays a key role in how the Lord perceives us and deals with us. Particularly when we meet as a congregation we just love to talk about "the world" as though we actually shun it or have successfully avoided being tainted by it. Yet (and know that I'm talking generalities and I'm not picking on one person or behavior) for other than what's inside of us, our outward appearance and behavior and choices are oft times nearly indistinguishable from the unsaved world. We tend to go to the same movies, watch the same TV programs, have the same jobs, react the same way when somebody cuts us off in traffic or our boss or spouse upsets us, and we usually more or less expect our fellowships to operate in

the same familiar way as secular governments or organizations operate.

It was when Israel became almost indistinguishable from the Canaanites in their appearance, and behavior, and choices and worship that God became angry and acted. It didn't matter that organically and internally they were His redeemed. As much as we may wish it were otherwise, God watches and evaluates what we DO because since He's the One who has given us redemption He already knows who's redeemed and who's not; He doesn't have to observe our behavior to find out. What do you think it must mean in God's perception when unless we TOLD someone we are Christians, no one might ever have suspected it? Sometimes I think that our Christian bumper stickers are there to tell others of our faith, because by our behavior and lifestyles that's about the only way anyone might ever know.

And the thing is, Israel in the era of the Judges merely wanted what we all typically want (but probably shouldn't): to blend in, not seem odd or out of step, and certainly not to be criticized or ridiculed and told we're ignorant or full of hate because we don't go along with what everyone else wants or the current political correctness.

Next week we'll examine the next Judge in a long line of Judges.