

Lesson 1 – Judges 3

Text: Judges 3

Main Characters: God, Israelites, Othniel, Ehud, Eglon, Shamgar

Key Passages:

- Judges 3:5-7 – The Israelites committed three sins that ultimately led to their punishment.
- Judges 3:8-10 – God was always able to be in control of the events surrounding Israel.

Main Storyline:

Following the death of Joshua and the other elders, the people of Israel forgot about God. God had not allowed Joshua and the rest of the first generation of Israelites in Canaan to fully cleanse the land together in order that future could be tested to see whether or not they would obey Him in hard situations. Unfortunately, the new generations did not pass the tests; they forgot God and served idols.

As a result of their idolatry and disobedience, God became furious and punished them by allowing them to be dominated by the Mesopotamians, under King Cushan-Rishathaim. The Israelites were forced to serve him for 8 years until they repented of their sins and cried out to God for deliverance. God heard their cries and raised up a deliverer (judge) to help them named Othniel (Caleb's nephew). God helped him to judge Israel and to save them from the Mesopotamians. After Othniel defeated the king and saved Israel, the Israelites had peace and rest for 40 years.

When Othniel died, the people reverted back to their wicked ways, doing evil as before. Once again, God became angry and punished them by allowing them to be dominated by the Moabites, under King Eglon, a very fat king who had also allied with the Ammonites and Moabites. Eglon forced the Israelites to serve him for 18 years, demanding that they pay tributes to him. Eventually, the Israelites repented and, again, cried out to God for help. God raised up a judge, Ehud, to deliver them from Eglon.

Ehud, a left-handed man, was in charge of bringing the tribute to Eglon. He made himself a dagger, about 18 inches long, and fastened it under his clothes to his right thigh (making it very hard to detect, since most people would have put it on their right sides). After giving the tribute to Eglon, Ehud told him that he had a secret message for him from God. Eglon was intrigued, and he asked everyone to leave his private chambers so that he could be alone with Ehud. When everyone had gone, Ehud pulled his sword out and stabbed Eglon in the belly, killing him. Eglon was so fat that the entire sword was enveloped by his flesh, and Ehud did not take it out. Ehud then locked the doors and escaped from the king's palace. The soldiers did not come in for a long time because they thought that Eglon was using the bathroom; finally, when a long time had passed, they opened the door and found their master dead.

Ehud went back to Israel (to the tribe of Ephraim) and summoned the armies of Israel to him with a trumpet. He told them that God had delivered their enemies into their hands. The Israelites, with Ehud as their leader, crushed the Moabites and freed Israel. Israel had rest and peace for 80 years.

After Ehud, another judge ruled named Shamgar (he was a contemporary of Deborah and Barak, see Judges 5:6). It seems that the people had, once again, fallen away and been punished by the Lord for their sins. After crying out, it seems that God raised Shamgar to deliver them. He fought against one of Israel's fiercest enemies, the Philistines, killing 600 of them with an ox goad (a sharp stick or spear).

Lessons/Applications:

- 1.) God is always fully in control; when we need help, it is through Him that we get what we need.
- 2.) We must recognize the successes and failures of the past and learn from them, not ignore them.
- 3.) God punishes His people in order to help them recognize sin in their lives (Hebrews 12:5-7).
- 4.) God, through His mercy, is willing to forgive the sins of people who truly repent.