

## **CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

### **DHW BIBLE CLASS**

#### **LESSON 3**

#### **JUDGES**

#### **CHAPTER 3**

**Judges 3:12**, *“And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD.”*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the previous chapter, “the angel of the LORD” whom we identified as the pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ, reassured the children of Israel that He would never break the covenant He had made with their “fathers” (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). In addition, He chided them for not obeying His commandment that they should not make any form of alliance with the inhabitants of the land and that they should destroy their places of worship. Notwithstanding He allowed the inhabitants of Canaan to live in the land and these people would be as “thorns” on their sides and their gods a snare unto them (2:1-4).

In this chapter, the LORD singled out the nations of the land,

which would become the means of testing the children of Israel of their allegiance and faithfulness to the LORD God. This marks the beginning of the vicious cycle of Israel’s sin and punishment and repentance and deliverance from sin. Israel demonstrated their stubbornness and rebellion against the LORD. As the LORD had promised to keep the covenant He made with them, He graciously raised a deliverer to free them from oppression by the Canaanites when Israel cried out to Him in repentance. One would have expected Israel to repent and return to the ways of the LORD, but Israel sinned again after the death of the judge, and the LORD had to patiently raise another deliverer and another to save Israel every time Israel repents.

Many precious lessons can be learned here. In our present study, we should bear in mind what “God could” pertaining to His power, and what “God would not” pertaining to His will. Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar are presented as the deliverers of Israel in a time of oppression. They exemplify men who walked in tandem with God, and those who walk in obedience to God will overcome evil. A wonderful truth is also that God uses all kinds of people to accomplish His holy will. God is not bound by one pattern of working and by one kind of personality.

The chapter falls naturally into the following sections: 1) Nations left unconquered (vv.1-7); 2) Othniel delivered Israel (vv. 8-11); 3) Ehud delivered Israel (vv.12-30); 4)

Shamgar delivered Israel (v. 31). NOTE that in these accounts of the confrontations of the judges, they do not involve the whole nation. They were tribal problems. This means that the judges were tribal judges rather than national judges where their influences were localized rather than national.

## COMMENTARY

### Nations Left Unconquered – 3:1-7

Is it not interesting to observe that the divine inspired writer wrote that it was the LORD who left the unconquered nations to remain in the Land? Israel failed to obey God and to drive the nations out of the land. The fact was victory could have been Israel's if they had obeyed the command of the LORD. The LORD could have directly destroyed them but He did not, letting them remain. The Israelites' victory over the other nations was not the outcome of their courage or war strategies or skills but because of God's faithfulness to His covenant with them. This precious truth should humble every child of God and remind him to be dependent on Him for all the struggles and battles in life. God does care for His own blood-bought people.

Two reasons were given for God allowing the other nations in the land to remain. These nations were, namely: five lords of the Philistines who were settlers on the south-western region of the land, the

Canaanites spread in the land, and the Sidonians and Hivites who settled on the north-western and north-eastern part of the land respectively. The first reason was that a new generation of Israelites had emerged during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness since they came out of Egypt. At this point of time in Judges, it was thirty years since they crossed the Jordan River and set foot on the Promised Land.<sup>1</sup> This new generation of Israelites had not known war as they ought to. This implied that the nations which were left behind would somehow wage war against Israel. God therefore desired His people to know the art of war (holy war) and how they should trust and rely on Him in battle. The other reason was God's intention to put Israel to the test whether they would obey His commandments which He gave through Moses (Deuteronomy 7:1-11).<sup>2</sup> God wanted to fully bless the

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<sup>1</sup> Joshua died at the age of 110 years (Joshua 24:29). When he entered the Promised Land he was about 80 years old.

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 7:2 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* a holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy

nation Israel, and in order to be fully blessed, they must obey His commandments completely. Sadly, the children of Israel failed and this was another chance given to them to repent and return to God by obeying.

In spite of the LORD'S assurance and reminder to the children of Israel not to compromise with the inhabitants of Canaan, they continued to sin against the LORD. They mingled with the Canaanites, took Canaanite women to be their wives, and gave their daughters to the Canaanite men in marriage. Moreover, they worshipped and served "Baalim", the gods of the Canaanites. "Groves" were wooden pillars carved by the Canaanites to represent their female goddess "Asherah." Israel's sin was a clear violation of the covenant of the LORD. It also showed the extent of their spiritual degradation.

#### **Othniel Delivers Israel – 3:8-11**

Israel's sin incurred the hot anger of the LORD, who "sold them" to Chushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia. The use of "sold" indicates that the children of Israel belonged to the LORD, His chosen people. The LORD loved and chose Israel among all the nations of the world not because Israel was great in

numbers, for they were the "fewest of all the people" (Deuteronomy 7:7). The LORD chose Israel because he loved Israel even though there was nothing lovely in Israel for the LORD to love. Israel belonged to the LORD just as local churches today belong to God. They are to be the visible witness of God's grace and mercies to a world in darkness and sin. Only to genuine believers could we say that they have been purchased with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. It is the invisible NOT the visible church that is washed by the blood of Christ where all are believers.

The name of the king of Mesopotamia, Chushan-rishathaim, means "dark and doubly wicked". The implication is obvious. He was really a very wicked and cruel oppressor. He was able to enslave the Israelites because it was in accordance with the LORD'S purpose to permit the Gentile king to oppress them. It was ironic—Israel the master now became Israel the servant-slave! The children of Israel suffered for eight years under this despotic king. They "cried out unto the LORD" for reason of their oppression. It was a penitent cry unto the LORD. The LORD heard their cry for deliverance. The LORD was merciful and His anger was not forever. He raised Othniel, the son of Kenaz, who was Caleb's younger brother.

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God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that *are* upon the face of the earth.

Othniel's identity was given with more details. He was not a true Israelite. Kenaz, his father, was the younger brother of Caleb who was one of twelve spies whom Moses sent to survey the Promised Land at Kadesh-barnea. Kenaz and Caleb belonged to the tribe of Judah. Othniel exemplifies a brave and faithful servant of the LORD in contrast to the rebellious Israelites. He showed himself to be a man of courage and ability when he took Debir and won the hand of Achsah, his uncle Caleb's daughter. He was the LORD'S choice to deliver the children of Israel from the Chushan-rishathaim

The Spirit of the LORD came upon him — a man of uncompromising devotion and allegiant to the LORD. He was strengthened and was able to overcome the king of Mesopotamia. Then he served as the judge of Israel and Israel had peace for forty years under his administration. After that he died. Othniel was not a young man when the LORD chose him to deliver Israel. Othniel could have been born soon after the Kadesh-barnea episode when all those who were above twenty years old died in the forty years of wilderness wandering or at the very most a young lad. At the time when he led the children of Israel against the king of Mesopotamia, he was at least about seventy years old if not older. The point is that when God chooses a person to do His will age is not a

relevant factor. The man whom God chooses, no matter what his age is, will be given the strength and power to fulfill His work.

### **Ehud Delivers Israel – 3:12-30**

After the death of Othniel, the children of Israel slid back to their sinful ways. The Israelites were to be God's kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But sadly the word "again" in verse 12 indicates the depravity of Israel to do "evil" in the sight of the LORD, blatantly defying Him. The LORD could not be mocked. He used a Gentile king as His rod of chastening against Israel. The LORD strengthened Eglon, the king of Moab to oppose Israel. In the past, the Moabites had failed to put a curse on Israel through the prophet Balaam.<sup>3</sup> Now, the LORD raised the Moabites to chastise the children of Israel. Eglon formed an alliance with the Ammonites and Amalekites to strike Israel and they captured "the city of palm trees" which was Jericho. The victory Joshua had led Israel against the city was now undone!

In all probability, Eglon used the city as his headquarters.<sup>4</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> Numbers 22:11 Behold, *there is* a people come out of Egypt, which covereth the face of the earth: come now, curse me them; peradventure I shall be able to overcome them, and drive them out.

<sup>4</sup> There is substantial evidence that Eglon used the city, (Leon Wood, *Dstressing Days of the Judges*, 172).

children of Israel were under oppressive servitude to the Moabites for eighteen years. The suffering Israelites again “cried unto the LORD.” It was a cry for deliverance. The divine writer did not mention that it was a genuine cry of confession and repentance of their sins and commitment to walk in the ways of the LORD. Again, the LORD was merciful and He raised among the Israelites a deliverer whose name was Ehud.

Ehud was the son of Gera, a Benjamite. The name “Benjamin” means *son of the right hand*, but Ehud was left-handed. A left-handed person was generally considered a handicap because most of the tools used in those days were made for the right handed. The LORD will turn this “handicap” into an advantage. Ehud was the messenger of the children of Israel to personally deliver their regular “present” or taxes to Eglon, the Moabite king. Ehud was a courageous man. In this particular instance, when delivering the taxes to Eglon, he had in mind to kill the king.

He hid a dagger on his right thigh. On the way out of the palace to return to Gilgal, he sent off his fellow companions who had gone with him to the king. He then returned to Eglon’s palace alone. Ehud told the king that he had a “secret errand”. Eglon dismissed his attendants in the palace, leaving Ehud and him alone together. Eglon was a fat man

lounging in his “summer parlour” which he had specially made for himself. Ehud drew near to him as if intending to convey the “secret errand” to him. As Ehud drew near, he told him that he had a message from God for him. Ehud took the dagger out of his right leg with his left hand unsuspectingly and thrust it into Eglon’s belly, and even the “dirt” (excrement, contents of the intestines) spilled out. Ehud could not pull out the dagger because the fat had enclosed it. He left the parlour through the front porch and locked its doors. As Ehud was leaving, Eglon’s servants came but dared not open the door to the parlour, thinking that their king “covereth his feet” (a euphemism, answering to the call of nature). Eglon’s servants eventually discovered the death of their lord.

By that time Ehud had made a clear escape. He quickly rallied the children of Israel by sounding the trumpet from Mount Ephraim. One can be certain that some Ephraimites might join him in the attack against the Moabites. He aroused those who responded to the call, saying that “the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand” (v.28a). Ehud displayed organisational skill and spiritual awareness that the battle was the LORD’S. Ehud led the Israelites (the number is not given) and they killed ten thousand strong and brave Moabites, defeating them.

And the land had “rest” for eighty years!

Ehud’s method of deliverance for the Israelites has incited some debate. Some have argued that “it is certain that God could not have approved of the treacherous way which he resorted to kill Eglon. God, being a holy and righteous God, could not have done it the way Ehud did.” This line of reasoning is fallacious. Eglon was a despot king who had subjugated God’s people. Ehud was said to be raised up by the LORD and he was called God’s deliverer (root word is “savior” see verse 15). Eglon was protected by his fighting men and assassination was the means by which the evil had to be overcome. What Ehud did was in a time of war and cannot be condemned by men who lived in peacetime using the law and order meant for peaceful existence.

Ehud’s trust in the LORD, courage and patriotism were all commendable and acceptable by the LORD.

### **Shamgar Delivers Israel – 3:31**

The third judge was Shamgar, the son of Anath (v.31). The phrase “and after him” intimates that the cycle of Israel’s sin, her cry to the LORD for deliverance, and the LORD raising a judge to save them, after the judgeship of Ehud, is repeated. This time they were oppressed by the

Philistines who dwelt in the south-western region of the Land. It is not mentioned how many years they were subjugated. The LORD in His everlasting mercy acted to save His chosen people once again. The LORD raised Shamgar. He was a most unlikely person to be chosen. Yet he was called and approved by God. Shamgar was not a Hebrew name, so also was the name of his father, Anath, which was the name of a Canaanite god of sex and war! This perhaps indicates that he was a non-Israelite who had believed in the LORD God of the Israelites. Unlike Othniel and Ehud, there is no mention of the nationality from which he belonged.

Shamgar used an ox goad as his weapon to fight the Philistines.<sup>5</sup> It was not the usual weapon for battle, but it was used by him with great effect. It might suggest that he was a farmer, and that he was big and strong in physique. He killed six hundred Philistines. Since the Philistines were located in the south western part of the land, in which the tribe of Judah was the nearest, the Judeans could have been the group who were oppressed by them. So Shamgar

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<sup>5</sup> An ox-goad could be as long as eight feet and having a circumference of six inches at its thickness end. It was sharpened at the one end so that it could be used to prod and drive oxen. It was made of hard wood, and it could become a formidable weapon in the hands of a strong man (Leon Wood, *Distressing Days of the Judges*, p.177).

single-handedly saved Israel. He probably, did not accomplish the feat all at once, but over a period of time which is not given. The LORD was with him in accomplishing such a great feat.

### **PRACTICAL VALUE**

We must remember that all evil done is in the sight of the LORD God. God sees everything that happens on the earth. Being a holy and righteous God, He will punish sin and the penalty of sin is death. When Christians sin, the LORD will be even more angry, and whom He loves He will chasten. Christians therefore should also learn that when they are convicted of their sins, they should quickly confess and repent and turn back to God. Their cry of confession and repentance to the LORD God will not be unheeded as we note in this chapter. The LORD is ever merciful if only we repent. The world's way is to demand forgiveness and mercy without repentance. This unscriptural doctrine must be uncompromisingly rejected.

A comforting and encouraging note is the fact that no one is too small, weak or despised to be used by God for His purpose. Although Shamgar was a non-Israelite, yet the LORD called and used him. While Othniel came from a strong and powerful family, nevertheless, it was his trust in the LORD that assured him

success. Shamgar on the other hand came from a humble background but because he was courageous and trusted the LORD, he too was successful. God uses anyone who is willing to trust and depend on Him with courage. As for Ehud, God used him to accomplish His purpose. The LORD God is sovereign and He chooses and approves the man to fulfill His plan and purpose.

Human depravity is exemplified in this chapter. Men easily forget the evil that they have committed and the blessings that they have received and enjoyed. How quickly Israel forgot the LORD God and the blessings He bestowed upon her. Forgetting the LORD, they sinned by disobeying Him. They slid further away from the LORD by worshipping and serving other gods. In the last days, Paul warned that men will love their own selves more than loving God. We must learn this lesson well. Do not incur the anger of the LORD, but live to honour and glorify Him in all that we are and do. AMEN

### **DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

#### **Daily Readings**

**MONDAY:** Judges 3:1-4; Deu. 7:1-11.

**TUESDAY:** Judges 3:5-7; Romans 6:23; Psalm 34:12-18.

**WEDNESDAY:** Judges 3:8-11; 2 Chronicles 7:13-14; 16:9.

**THURSDAY:** Judges 3:12-30; Exodus 1:19-20; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29.

**FRIDAY:** Judges 3:31; Ephesians 6:11-20.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What is your view of marrying an unbeliever? Is it a serious sin? If your son or daughter were to marry an unbeliever would you attend their wedding?

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2. What does it mean in verse 7 to say that Israel has forgotten Jehovah their God? How does a Christian be said to have forgotten Jehovah today?

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3. Can bad things happen to Christians?

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4. What impact does a leader have in the lives of Israel that when he is alive Israel walked with God and had peace but after his death Israel went back to sin? What does it mean for the local church and the Bible College or Seminary or any of God's ministries?

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5. What lessons might we personally learn from the information we are given about Othniel in this passage?

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6. Compare and contrast Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar, both in what they did and in their method of doing it. What quality was present in all three that enabled God to use them?

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7. What recurring pattern in this chapter do you see concerning Israel and the LORD?

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8. What is the great practical point of staying obedient to the LORD? How does your conclusion throw some light on the spiritual condition of the local churches today?

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9. What did the LORD do against Israel and what did He do for Israel? What insight can you draw from your conclusion about the principles of God's dealings with His people?

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