

## Judges 3A

- The introduction to Judges is finally behind us, so we're well-prepared to study Samuel's storyline
  - Beginning today in chapter 3, and continuing into chapter 16, we we enter into the heart of the book
    - We'll study 12 judges of Israel altogether
    - Each judge comes to power for a time during the 300 years of Israel's history
    - They are not like kings, in which the passing of one judge leads to the inauguration of a new judge
    - Judges operated more like prophets, who were raised up independently of one another and at unpredictable times
  - The number twelve is itself an interesting detail, since the number has a particular meaning in scripture
    - Twelve represents God ruling His people through appointed representatives
    - Just as we saw twelve apostles in the church and twelve tribes in Israel, so there were twelve judges in Israel
  - That's why we call this period in Israel's history a theocracy
    - A theocracy is a government where God rules
    - And that rule is accomplished by representatives who bring the word and direct the people and judge their mistakes
- To start this section, we'll look at the first 6 verses of chapter 3
  - The passage is marked out separately on your study handout because it stands out
    - Here we will find the Lord explaining that a test will now ensue for Israel
    - The test has four purposes, and each purpose explains why God decided to leave Canaanites in the land with Israel

[Judg. 3:1](#) Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to test Israel by them (that is, all who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan;

[Judg. 3:2](#) only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war, those who had not experienced it formerly).

[Judg. 3:3](#) These nations are: the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath.

[Judg. 3:4](#) They were for testing Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers through Moses.

[Judg. 3:5](#) The sons of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites;

[Judg. 3:6](#) and they took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

- This isn't the first time the Lord has said that the people of Israel will be tested by the Canaanite peoples
  - Remember in chapter 2 the angel of the Lord said that the Canaanites would be used to test the hearts of God's people
    - The Lord gave us the first two reasons for the test
    - First, the Canaanites will reveal the hearts of Israel because their pagan influence will give Israel a choice of who to worship
    - As Joshua warned the people before his death, choose who you will serve, God or other gods
    - Some in Israel will pass this test, remaining true to Yahweh
    - But most will fail the test by going after foreign gods
- Secondly, the angel of the Lord said that the Canaanites will be a retribution to the people for their sin under the covenant
  - They will be a thorn in the side of the people
    - Plundering, enslaving and generally harassing the people
    - Consider the Canaanites to be instrument of discipline
  - To those two reasons, chapter 3 now adds two more reasons for leaving the Canaanites in the land

- In v.2 the Lord said He wanted this generation of Israel to experience warfare
- The generation that preceded this generation fought its way into the land under Joshua
- This generation of Israel is the baby boomer generation of Israel
  - They didn't fight for what they have
  - Their prosperity was handed to them by their parents
  - And it produced a degree of entitlement and an unwillingness to obey authority
- That's why the Lord wants them to experience warfare in fighting the Canaanites in the land
  - Notice he says they must be "taught" war
    - At first this sounds like God is teaching Israel the art of warfare, of becoming more effective warriors
    - But that wouldn't make any sense
    - Israel has never been known as a mighty nation of warriors, not even in Joshua's generation
    - All their great victories like at Jericho have come only because the Lord did the fighting
    - Even the people in the land recognized that the God of Israel was fighting for them
  - And that is the Lord's point here
    - This generation has forgotten how the Lord delivered Israel in the past
    - They do not understand nor appreciate the power of the Lord with Whom they have a covenant
    - So, the Lord wants to teach them warfare but according to the Lord's way
    - The Lord's way of warfare is to obey His commands and watch Him win the victories on their behalf

- The Lord hasn't stopped working this way...today He allows His Church to experience conflict, trial and calamity for similar reasons
  - He delights to show Himself strong when we are in the midst of our enemies
    - So from time to time, the Lord will bring us into circumstances that rock our boat or our world
    - He doesn't allow calamity to hurt us, but so that He can show up in our lives in a powerful way
    - And here's what we need to remember
    - The Lord is often fighting for a different objective than we are
  - When the bad times comes, we are prone to seeing the person or situation that has come against us as the problem to be solved
    - We see our battle as against something moving us *away* from peace and contentment
    - And we define winning as a *return* to our previous circumstances or better
  - Israel will perceive their circumstances in this way in Judges
    - They recognize that their peace in the land was at risk because of the Canaanites attacks
    - So they made their goal finding a peaceful way of life in the land, by living side by side with the Canaanites
    - But that wasn't the Lord's goal
- The Lord's goal is to change us through the struggle we're experiencing
  - Remember, the Lord doesn't need your might or wisdom in the fight
    - The Lord has the power to win the battle by Himself
    - He could have driven out the Canaanites
    - Israel's strength was immaterial to the outcome
    - Likewise, the Lord can put an end to your struggles any day He chooses
  - So why does the Lord allow the fight to happen all much less continue?

- The answer for us is the same as it was for Israel
- He wants to train us in warfare
- As a new Christian, we're not experienced in spiritual battles
- When you suffer insults or attacks, you've been thrust into a spiritual test
  - When you experience a disaster like a fire or flood, your war has begun
  - When you lose a job, contract an illness, experience broken relationships, or just stress out of an exam or work assignment...the battle has begun
- But you're not fighting alone
  - The Lord is your strength, He has the power to win the battle
  - And as we face these trials, we will be strengthened in the battle
- War exposes spiritual weakness and exposes opportunities to be sanctified
  - Whether our weakness is a lack of trust in the Lord, a lack of patience, selfishness, pride or whatever, the stress of battle will expose it
  - And in the process, the Lord uses these circumstances to reshape our hearts
- This why the Bible says pray for trials, and why the church has always been strongest during periods of persecution
  - Our degree of spiritual maturity is directly proportional to our experience in spiritual warfare
    - Not everyone survives these battles
    - There will be casualties along the way
    - A casualty in the sense that some believers are unable or unwilling to learn the hard lessons that God is endeavoring to teach
    - In the worst case, the test reveals that some who claim a place in the body of Christ have never been born again truly

- But for the one who is trained up by the Lord's discipline, there will be peaceful fruit of righteousness
- In Judges, the Lord is eager to deliver lessons that can only be learned in warfare
  - For Israel, the warfare will be not only spiritual but also literal
  - Israel will come into conflict with the Canaanites, both as spiritual stumbling blocks and as military adversaries
  - And in both ways, the people in the land will test and teach the hearts of the people
- Finally, the Lord says the Canaanite people in the Land will serve to test Israel's commitment to the covenant
  - As the Lord says in v.4, "to find out if they would obey the commandments of the Lord"
    - This seems like a strange reason to engage in a test of the people of Israel
    - First, they have already broken the covenant, more than once
    - So the answer to the question is already evident
    - The people do not obey the covenant
    - No generation of Israel can obey this covenant
  - Secondly, the Lord wouldn't need a test to know their hearts
    - The Lord knows the hearts of all men
    - There is nothing hidden to Him
    - So why the question?
- Like all tests in scripture, this one isn't intended to inform the Lord
  - The audience is Israel itself and all God's people throughout time
    - As when the Lord asked if He should reveal to Abraham what He planned to do in Sodom
    - The question was asked with a purpose in mind, to invite Abraham into a conversation

- And similarly, these years will reveal to us that human judges can't rule over sinful hearts
  - That a covenant written on stone can't compel righteousness in us
  - That sin and rebellion is hard-wired into the very nature of humanity
- And learning that fact leads us all to recognize we need a different solution to reconcile with God
  - A different covenant, under different terms.
  - For if Israel couldn't find obedience to God's law with all they were given, how could we?
- As Paul observed

**Rom. 3:19** Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God;

**Rom. 3:20** because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

- What the Law says, it says to Israel, those under the Law
- But why did Israel possess a Law they couldn't keep?
- So that every mouth may be lose and the world may be accountable
- Because through Israel's experience living under the Law we come to learn that no flesh can be justified by works of law
- We only learn more and more about the pervasive, unrelenting nature of sin
- That's the reason for the test...to reveal how impossible it is for a law or rule or even a strong judge to rescue us from our sin nature
  - If that were ever a possibility, then Judges would have been the time to see that happen
    - Israel had everything going for them at the start
    - They had the land set out before them

- The Lord winning their battles
- The word of God revealed through Moses
- A priesthood and tabernacle filled by the glory of God
- And a covenant with a God Who is forever faithful
- But obedience to God requires a more powerful law, one written on our hearts
  - And a force for change within us to lead us into obedience
  - And ultimately a new body without the desire to rebel
  - God is prepared to give us these things
  - But before we can understand the need for them, we must understand the impossibility of succeeding in any other way
- And to provide the point quickly, Samuel describes the reign of the first judge in a mere five verses

**Judg. 3:7** The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth.

**Judg. 3:8** Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the sons of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years.

**Judg. 3:9** When the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.

**Judg. 3:10** The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand, so that he prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim.

**Judg. 3:11** Then the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

- In this short account of the first judge, we discover a pattern, one that will be repeated seven times in the book of Judges
  - The pattern is easy to see
  - Samuel even repeats several key phrases across these seven examples to make sure we don't miss the point
  - Not every phrase appears in each example, because after a while you get the point

- But to begin, all of the phrases are found in this first example
- The first phrase appears in v.7, where we see the beginning of the pattern
  - The sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord
  - Specifically, they worshipped the gods of the Canaanites
- In Canaanite mythology, the chief god was El, who was father of all other gods
  - His wife was Asherah (or Asheroth), the mother of gods and the goddess of the sea
  - Then there was Baal, the god of rain and fertility
  - Ashtoreth was the female counterpart to Baal, responsible for female fertility and a goddess of love and war
  - Anah, Baal's sister and his wife
  - There are the five primary gods of Canaan that entrapped the Israelites living in the time of Judges
- Notice the Lord's declaration in v.7 is a direct repudiation of the people's perspective
  - Earlier, we learned the people did what was right in their own eyes
    - But now we hear that in the sight of the Lord, the people were doing evil
    - Human eyes is a reference to flesh, while the word "sight" suggests true insight and wisdom
    - The Lord knew better that what they people did was evil
  - Moreover, the Lord is the true Judge, so His opinion is the only one that matters
    - In v.8 we learn that His anger burned against the people because of their sins
    - And as promised, He uses the people of Canaan to bring judgment
  - Here we the second common phrase in the pattern I mentioned

- Samuel says the people were sold into the hands of an enemy
- Sometimes the phrase will read given into the hand...
- The point is the circumstances Israel encountered were the direct result of a decision God made to bring it about
- It wasn't bad luck; it was providential
- As a result, the people in Israel were once again enslaved
  - This time the enemy was a king in Mesopotamia
    - He was powerful enough to capture all Canaan and take most if not all of Israel captive as slaves back to Mesopotamia
    - His name is Cushan-rishathaim, and the second half of his name means "double wicked"
    - He oppressed Israel greatly
  - At some point, the people learned a lesson, and they cried to the Lord for mercy
    - This is the third repeating phrase
    - Every time Israel is confronted with the consequences of their sin, they cry out, which is exactly as God intended
    - Which leads to the fourth part of the pattern
  - When the Lord heard their cry, he rose up a deliverer
    - The deliverer was the judge Othniel, Caleb's younger brother
    - The fact that Othniel could be the judge tells us that this apostasy happened shortly after the people were in the land
    - This man was the gift God gave Israel in response to their cries to him
- Othniel experiences the Spirit of the Lord coming "upon" this man
  - This is the principle ministry of the Spirit in the Old Testament
    - He will come upon a man at a point in time to effect a certain outcome in ministry, like Joshua or the men who built the tabernacle

- This ministry does not depend on the character of a person
- Unlike the New Testament ministry, this ministry of the Spirit isn't associated with the salvation of a person, since He can come and later depart
- The purpose was to empower a man or woman for service according to God's will
- The result of the man receiving the Spirit of the Lord while in captivity is to somehow lead the people in a rebellion
  - We don't know the details, except that he was successful in winning the people's freedom
  - They run their oppressors out of the land
  - And for forty years the nation experience peace in the land
- The whole story sounds like a mini-Exodus, doesn't?
  - It should because that's the point
    - The Lord was giving a new generation a chance to learn warfare in the way their ancestors did
    - Sin leads to slavery
    - Disobedience to God produces slavery to sin and death
    - But repentance and cries for mercy will lead God to raise up a deliverer for His people
  - The final two phrases in our pattern are found in this ending
    - The Lord gave the oppressors into the hands of the judge
    - And the land saw a period of rest as a result
  - Notice the length of rest was forty years
    - The number forty in scripture represents testing
    - Just as Jesus was tested in the desert for 40 days
    - And the people of Israel wandered in the desert for 40 years
    - So now these generation has fallen, experienced judgment, cried out for mercy

- And now they are experiencing the peace of resting in the Lord's work to free them from slavery
- This isn't just the Exodus story...it's the Gospel
  - We enter into slavery by our sin, being a slave to that sin
  - We will live there perpetually until such time that we lift our eyes to heaven and cry to the Lord
  - And by our repentance and by turning in faith to Christ, we are granted that mercy
- In faithfulness to His covenant, the Lord raises up Deliverer, Christ
  - Who was raised from the grave, having died for our sins
  - And He wins the battle over our slavery for us
  - And once we have that victory, we rest in that work
  - That's the victory that faith wins
  - The one that earthly judges and earthly kings couldn't win for us
  - But the One Judge and King of the Creation did win for us
- That's the pattern we'll see repeated in seven of the 12 judges
  - The pattern repeats but it changes
    - The sins get worse
    - The victories become less complete
    - The period of peace and rest grows shorter
  - Once again, nothing men can accomplish by the flesh can replace what God alone does in our spirit
    - Our salvation and freedom from sin can only be won on our behalf by Christ on the cross
    - And Judges only serves to prove that point