

Revival in Judges: Othniel

Revival

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Bible Text: Judges 3:1-11

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Our study in Judges has come to chapter three. Chapter three of Judges follows Judges one and Judges two.

You say, “Well, I know that. I can add. I can follow numbers.”

Well, I don’t mention that to check out your mathematics skills. I mention it because of what happened as recorded in Judges chapter one and two have a bearing on chapter three. And just a real quick review of chapters one and two so that you can see how it blends in with chapter three. In chapters one and two we read about the death of Joshua, their faithful leader who had led them into the Promised Land and had led them in conquering battles over the enemies that they encountered when they came into the Promised Land. And Joshua died and they did not have a leader. But it says they called upon the Lord. They sought the Lord after Joshua’s death and God gave them wisdom and direction as to how to go into battle. And thus followed 10 victories over their enemies because they sought the Lord and he helped them.

One of those victories only resulted in a partial victory, because part of the way into it they encountered enemies down in the plain who had iron chariots and it says they did not try to conquer those who had the iron chariots in direct contradiction to what God had instructed them through Joshua. He had told them, “Don’t flee from the chariots of iron. God will give you the power to overcome them and to defeat them.” And so that victory only resulted in a partial victory because they did not defeat those in the plain. Their unbelief, their infidelity, their failure to trust God had severe consequences, because after those 10 victories came seven straight defeats at the hand of their enemies and at the hand of their enemies they resulted in intermingling among the Canaanites in the land and as a result the bowed down and worshipped the idols and the false gods of the Canaanites and they forsook the God who brought them out of Egypt and into the Promised Land.

And at the end of chapter two we read God said summary of affairs. He told them that because they failed to believe him and to trust him, he would not drive out the enemies from them any longer. And the enemies would remain there intermingled with the Israelites. And it would result in their intermarriage and it result in their idolatry following after their gods. And God told them, “I am going to permit this as a test,

because I want to see. Will you follow me or will you follow the people among whom you live?"

In chapter three we come to the first test, the first time when God leaves them alone. He abandons them. He told them when they came into the Promised Land, he said, "As long as you trust me and follow me I will give you victory over all of your enemies. But when you fail to obey me and fail to trust me, I will become your enemy and I will fight against you and your enemies will overtake you and you will become their slaves and you will worship their gods and I will not be your God anymore."

Well, when we come to chapter three of Judges and we find that very thing come to pass. Pick up the page that I have printed for you and we will start and we will read through some of the verses and we will see what they describe for us, for the children of Israel, Judges chapter three and we will start with verses one through four.

Now these are the nations that the LORD left, to test Israel by them, that is, all in Israel who had not experienced all the wars in Canaan. It was only in order that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, to teach war to those who had not known it before. These are the nations: the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived on Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath. They were for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.¹

At the beginning of this passage it says they didn't know war. And God permitted these enemies to stay there so that they could learn war. Now what does that mean? Does that sound like God is a great warrior and all he does is enjoy war? Remember as I gave a summary of their coming into the land, how were they to practice war? By trusting God and by obeying him. These people had grown up without knowing how to do the kind of battle that God instructed them to do. They didn't know how to trust God. They had failed to trust him in the past and in the present. They didn't know how to do war God's way. And so he left the enemies there to see will they call upon me or not? And so he left these enemies there and they are listed.

God had commanded them. When you come into the land, destroy all of the inhabitants of the land. Don't leave any of them. And destroy their altars, because if you don't you will end up marrying them and worshipping their gods. And so God gave them very clear direction. Now he wants to see. Will these people, these left over children of Israel now in the land, will they follow me or not? Will they call upon me as they had in the past and, thus, learn how to battle the way I would instruct them?

We find starting in verse number five the first part of the test. We read here, verses five, six and seven.

¹ Judges 3:1-4.

“So the people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.”²

That is a whole variety of tribal nations.

And their daughters they took to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons, and they served their gods. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth.³

When I said a few moments ago that their unbelief have severe consequences, we now begin to see the consequences that resulted from their unbelief. They failed to seek God. They failed to trust him and to believe him. So he left their enemies there. And their enemies took over. And just as God had warned them, it came to pass. They intermarried. They married their daughters and their daughters became wives for their sons and they ended up marrying with the godless people inhabiting the land of Canaan. As usually happens, when a believer ends up marrying an unbeliever as they end up worshipping the god of the unbeliever. And that is exactly what happened to the children of Israel. They ended up worshipping the gods of those whom they married from the enemies in the land and they became idol worshippers. They worshipped, it says, the Baal and the Ashtoreth. Those were sex gods. And those were gods of the fields and gods of crops and gods of this tribe and gods of that tribe and there was a pluralistic society in which they now lived. And everybody’s god was a good god and you had to worship all of them.

And the saddest part of it all we read in the last sentence. It says:

“They forgot the LORD their God.”⁴

In the midst of their idol worship, in the midst of their intermarrying with the people’s in the land, in the midst of their failure to destroy them and to drive them out as God instructed them, they forgot God and left him to worship the gods of the society in which they lived.

Notice verse number eight. It says:

“Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia. And the people of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years.”⁵

The land of Mesopotamia stood to the north and the east of Canaan all the way back to the land of Iraq as we now know it, a broad expanse of land governed by this king. He

² Judges 3:5.

³ Judges 3:6-7.

⁴ Judges 3:7.

⁵ Judges 3:8.

came down and he conquered the Israelites and he enslaved them, forced them into slavery for him.

Doesn't that sound a little bit familiar? From what did God deliver them in Egypt? Slavery. They were slaves in Egypt. And God in his grace and mercy brought them out of Egypt through the Promised Land, through the wilderness, to the Promised Land where he would set them free and they would live without restraint under another king or ruler.

Ah, but because they disobeyed God and failed to believe him, now they ended up right back where they started, enslaved to a foreign king, exactly as God said would happen. He said he would fight against them, he would become their enemy and, sure enough, he did. He enabled this godless, wicked king to come and to destroy them and to place them into servitude. Eight years they suffered, not as long as they did down in Egypt but a long time. Eight years of servile labor to a foreign godless king in the land where they should have lived as rulers.

The anger of the Lord came against them. Verse number nine.

But when the people of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel, who saved them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. The Spirit of the LORD was upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand. And his hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. So the land had rest forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died.⁶

God raised up a judge just like he said he would. We read that at the end of chapter two. God said he would raise up judges periodically who would deliver them from their enemies and they would experience rest and peace during the lifetime of that judge. But he also said that at the end of the life of that judge they would fall right back worse than they were before. Well, we don't see that recorded here, but our next study we will see that. Here we have Othniel. God raised him up to become the judge of Israel.

Othniel has a little bit of good history. You can read about him in chapter one of Judges. Caleb, one of the two bright lights out of the wilderness who believed and trusted God all the years of the wanderings in the wilderness they came into the Promised Land, the only two of that generation that left Egypt got into the Promised Land, Joshua and Caleb. Caleb came to inhabit and occupy the land that came to him by lot. A particular spot had some very difficult enemies and he made a promise. He said, "Whoever it is that defeats the enemies in Debir, I will give to that man my daughter in marriage." Kind of a grand prize in that day.

Othniel, his nephew—now it says here his brother—it wasn't a physical brother. It was more like a collegial brother, a friend that you would call a brother, a sister. It was actually his nephew. He said, "I will take that mountain." And he went and he defeated

⁶ Judges 3:9-11.

the people in Debir. And faithful to his promise, Caleb gave him his daughter in marriage. So now he had a double relationship with Othniel, not only as a nephew, but as his son-in-law. He knew how to do war God's way, one of the few in Israel at that time. He knew how to wage war in God's way. God raised him up to become the champion, the savior, the judge, the one who would lead the people into victory. And he enabled Othniel to defeat this wicked, godless king who had defeated them eight years previously. And all during the lifetime of Othniel they experienced rest and peace for 40 years. And then it says he died.

As we examine these verses I this record, this narrative provided for us in Judges, what does it reveal to us about the true character and nature of the children of Israel? They were a children of unbelief. They didn't believe God. They didn't trust him. They didn't obey him. They didn't follow his directions, his commandments in life. And, in fact, they went so far as to forsake him. They abandoned him. They left him. They wanted nothing to do with him. They preferred the idols of the people of the land that they failed to conquer instead of the God who had brought them out of Egypt through the wilderness and had given them such grand victories in the Promised Land as long as they trusted him.

We find them pursuing after sin, choosing idolatry, choosing to intermarry with the children of Canaan instead of among themselves. And God had warned them about that. If you don't destroy them you will end up intermarrying with them and they will lead you astray. That happened just as God said it would.

The said part of it is, they preferred that. They preferred that over and above what God had given them. And when you contrast the two, it gives the contrast so radical it is like night and day. Sadly they chose night. They chose to pursue their own follies and to abandon God.

As we look over those verses we also see recorded for us a description of the nature of God. And, in fact, more so than the children of Israel it gives to us a more clear picture of the nature of God, because, you see, God's hand interwoven all throughout these 11 verses that we read. God left the enemies there. God became an enemy to the children of Israel. God disciplined and judged the children of Israel for their disobedience and their sin. God raised up a Savior, Othniel to rescue them. God provided for them rest in the midst of their difficulties and distress. You can't read that without seeing God's hand in there. We see his faithfulness. On the one hand we see his faithfulness to those who would believe him and trust him and obey him. He was faithful. He kept his word to them. We also see him faithful on the other side of the coin, that if you disobey me, I will bring judgment against you. And he did. He brought judgment against them because of their disobedience. On both hands, the faithfulness of God he keeps his Word.

We also see here God's wrath against sin. God hates sin. God didn't design sin. God didn't create sin. God hates sin. And we always throughout all of Scripture and specifically these verses that we have read, we see God always judges sin, always, always judges sin. God doesn't condone sin. If you have lived a life of sin—I will stick in here in

parenthesis—and God hasn't brought severe judgment against you, it isn't because God doesn't judge sin. God is also long suffering. He is patient. He waits, giving you time, testing you. Will you turn? Will you come to me?

Well, we see God's wrath against sin very clearly displayed here on the one hand against the Canaanites when they first came into the Promised Land. We see his wrath against the sin of Israel because of their disobedience. He put them into slavery just like he promised. And then we see God's judgment against Cushan for his wickedness.

God's wrath against sin and God judges sin because of his holiness. God is a holy God. No sin, no error, no default in him at all. A holy God and you will recall that when we have studied on previous occasions the creation of man at the beginning, how did he create man? Holy. Righteous. Upright. And God still has a plan in motion that he described to his children of Israel that he planned to restore them back to holiness. And holiness would become the foundation of that nation. And he gave them the law to teach them holiness and the demands of holiness and how it would look and what they should practice. And he told them that if you will live my law you will become a blessing to all of the nations of the earth and they will look upon you with jealousy, because you experience my presence.

The holiness is the foundation of God's creation and it is the foundation of his work with the children of Israel. And he wanted them to be a holy people.

We also see God described here as a sovereign God. God controls all things, even our enemies, even his enemies. He controls them. He has authority over them and he can cause a Cushan to come against his children and bring discipline and difficult times against them just as easily as he can defeat them on their behalf. And he is sovereign not only of the children of Israel, but he is sovereign over the Canaanites and he is sovereign over the people under Cushan, the godless ruler of Mesopotamia. He is God over all things, sovereign God.

And then in the end when he raises up Othniel we see his sovereignty in raising him up. We see his grace and his mercy in providing a Savior for them in the midst of their distress and their difficulty. He provides for them a Savior, a people who have forsaken him, a people who had thumbed their nose at him. He provides a Savior for them.

Oh what grace and mercy of God.

Well, why do you think God would move upon Samuel to write and record these events and these narratives? Because he wrote them after they occurred. Why would God move upon him to do that? He wanted his children to know their past. And their history. He wanted them to know their true heart condition of they rejected God and what would come upon them for their failure to trust God and to obey him, because God continued to call them. God continued to call upon them to obey him and to believe him. And the cycle that we see described for us in these verses of wickedness to victory and back to wickedness again, that cycle repeats through not only the book of Judges, but throughout

all of the history, not only of Israel, but the history of mankind. And God wanted his children of Israel to know their past and to know their wickedness and their sinfulness. And he wanted them to know about him, God and his nature and what he would do on their behalf as he had promised.

He wanted them to know that if they would call upon him, he would answer. He wanted them to know about this nature as well, about his goodness, his mercy, his grace, his authority over all things and that he alone stood as God and there is no other.

How do these events relate to Jesus Christ? Because all of Scrip relates to Jesus Christ in some fashion or form. How do these relate to Jesus? Well, they relate in some very clear fashion. They relate like this. Man needs a Savior. Man can't please God on his own. Man needs God and he needs to call upon God and he needs to trust God and God calls upon him and says, "Trust me. Believe me." And he provides all kinds of records to show his goodness and his worthiness of our trust and our confidence in him. And all throughout the history, starting with Abraham all the way through history, God has provided saviors along the way until finally it culminated in the Savior, the one that he had pictured and described and promised for hundreds of years to the children of Israel. He finally provided in Jesus Christ his Son.

In the fullness of time, the Scriptures tell us, God sent forth his Son made of a woman, made under the law that he might redeem those who are under the law. God fulfilled his promise just like he said and just like he raised up Othniel and we will see other judges and we will see other kings where god raised them up for the salvation of his people for a short time period, we come now to the Savior who saves for eternity. No temporary victories. Victory is for eternity through this Savior, through this one named Jesus. And all who trust in Jesus find eternal life. Victory forever.

So this passage, although it seems a bit obscure at first glance, does connect to Christ because it gives a picture of what Jesus came to accomplish. He came to accomplish holiness in the lives of men and women like you and like me. And that fulfills God's plan that he started in the Garden of Eden, creating man in his own image, righteous and upright. And now through faith in Christ sinners like you and like me can experience the presence of God once again and become holy in our behavior, a plan and purpose of God for his creation.

How can the Holy Spirit use these things in your lives today? Well, for one thing he can correct you from error. He can point out to you the truth. He can convict you and point out to you your failure to trust him as he has called upon you to trust him. He can comfort you and you can say, "Well, I have trusted Christ." Then you can experience the comfort that God gives to those who trust him. And that comfort you will experience not only in this life, but throughout eternity. That is his promise.

What changes do you need to make if any? Well, you need to call upon the Lord. That is where it starts. You need to trust him just like the children of Israel. They cried unto the Lord in the midst of their distress. They called upon him, "God save us. God help us."

You need to call upon him and trust him. Trust him as your Savior, as your Othniel, not for a temporary victory, but for an eternal victory.

Those of us who have trusted him need to find our comfort in his promise. In the midst of the times that we face that are difficult, we need to again trust him. We need to trust him continuously, calling upon him. Lord, help me. You promised. I am experiencing some difficulty in life and I need your help and God has promised to help all who call upon him.

It is my prayer as I stated at the very beginning, it is my prayer that you call upon Christ and trust the Savior that God has provided for people like you and like me. And Jesus has said all who come to me I will in no wise cast out. And the Scriptures tell us that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. And so I urge you today if you have not called upon him, trust him today. And those of you who have trusted him in the past, call upon him today to encourage you and to comfort you in the face of life's vicissitudes and changes. He has promised. If you call on him, you will find him faithful to you as well.

Let's close with a word of prayer.