

Intro. I don't mean to sound stereotypical, but men tend to be more of the fixer-uppers in the home than women (though there are some women who do just fine). Women can struggle when things are broken, just as many men can struggle with cooking & cleaning. Recently, a couple of our office women encountered something that needed fixed (show Ryan as Thor video). Heroes come in all shapes & sizes & looks! As we look at Judges 3 today in our study of "Heroes: Man's Rebellion & Repentance, God's Provision & Peace," we focus on "Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar & the Mysterious Work of the Lord."

Theme: Sin & hope

Background: After Joshua & his generation died, Israel began doing evil in the eyes of the Lord & gave themselves over to apostasy (serving false gods). The Lord caused other nations to oppress them, to which Israel cried out in repentance. The Lord raised up a judge to deliver them & usher in a time of peace, before the whole process began again. There were 7 cycles listed in fulfillment of God's words in Leviticus 26 & His punishment on them 7x (vv. 18, 21, 24, 28). The 7 major judges & 5 minor judges are from the 12 tribes of Israel (minus Levi, who is represented in the closing chapters)—God raised up help from each tribe, but each tribe also failed miserably.

Overview of the Narrative:

- Israel did not drive out all the nations from Canaan, because they disobeyed the Lord & the Lord left them to test Israel. They failed the test, because they intermarried & began serving false gods—the issue wasn't a race issue with intermarriage, but a covenant faithfulness issue—Rahab the harlot (Canaanite) & Ruth the Moabitess both became believers in Yahweh & part of God's covenant people
 - Because the people of Israel did evil in the eyes of Yahweh by forgetting Him while serving Baals & Ashtheroth, He became angry & gave them over to Cushan-rishathaim ("doubly wicked")—mentioned 4x; a name probably given to him by others, like Ivan the Terrible
 - When Israel cried out, probably in repentance, God raised up a deliverer—Othniel (introduced in 1:11-15), who was courageous, a nephew to Caleb (& son-in-law), upon whom the Spirit of Yahweh was & brought him victory—Othniel set a high standard for future judges
 - After a generation of rest (40 years), the people relapsed & Yahweh strengthened Eglon, king of Moab, who gathered with surrounding forces to oppress Israel for 18 years
 - The Lord then heard the cries of Israel & raised up Ehud, from the tribe of Benjamin ("son of my right hand/strength"), but he was trained to fight left-handed ("restricted right hand," cf. 20:16; 1 Chronicles 12:2). Israel sent a gift (of food) to Eglon by Ehud, & because Eglon loved food (he was extremely fat & his name meant "bull/calf"), he received it well. As Ehud departed, he left his porters & returned with a message, a special message from God for the king, who ordered everyone out so he could hear it for himself. Little did he know Ehud had concealed his weapon on his right thigh & plunged it into his belly (his fat surrounded the handle) & killed him while he locked the doors & escaped (the guards assumed Eglon was relieving himself in the bathroom)—why don't we include this story in children's Bible stories? It's like Hans Christian Andersen's famous fairy tale *The Emperor Has No Clothes* (due to Eglon's pride, gluttony & gullibility)
 - Once word spreads of Eglon's death, Ehud rallies Israel to overthrow Moab & killed 10,000 strong men with none escaping & the land had rest for 2 generations (80 years)
 - Then we get a brief note on Shamgar, son of Anath (his mother named after the Canaanite goddess of war), who killed 600 Philistines (from the coast of the Mediterranean) with an oxgoad (a long, pointed stick used to prod reluctant animals as they plowed)—while this brief verse appears to credit Shamgar, we know from 2:11 & 10:11 that Yahweh was behind it
- Some of these weeks, I'm going to reiterate some of the key lessons we learned in the introduction of chapters 1-2. The first 2 lessons I'm sharing today are linked to what we saw last week, but the last 2 lessons are new:

1. Obey the Lord & avoid sin, especially false worship (3:5-8, 12-14)

- Yahweh wanted Israel to learn war (3:2), not so much how to conduct it but the nature & significance of it—they were called to a holy war with Yahweh as Commander-in-Chief to destroy the enemy—totally exterminate so they wouldn't follow their gods (cf. Deuteronomy 7:3-4)
- Whatever the Lord commands you to do in light of the new covenant in Christ should be done or else you not only sin, but you may open the door for further sin

Illus: How many times have you known someone who abuses drugs or alcohol only to lead to anger, sexual immorality, crime & more?

2. When you sin, cry out to the Lord & He will deliver you (3:9-11, 15-31)

- Not only do we see this in the Judges narrative, but Paul writes, “All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13)—it's a call for deliverance, a cry for help, a plea for the only One who can set your right with God

3. Thank God for His tests, because they are meant to draw us closer to Him in obedience (2:22; 3:1, 4, 8, 12; cf. Genesis 22:1; James 1:2-4)

- Not only did He test Israel in chapter 2, but also in the beginning of chapter 3 & then He strengthened Elgoun against Israel for 18 years of oppression—that's mysterious for the Lord to work that way, isn't it?
- But what's the purpose of it? To drive us to our knees so we reach out to Him in full dependence & obedience
- Just as children learn that there is a great likelihood of getting affirmative responses from parents for their requests if they are obedient (they aren't going to disobey & then ask to borrow the car for a date), so believers know innately to obey the Lord if they want their requests answered by Him, thus they obey Him as they depend on Him in prayer

Illus: Genesis 22:1 shows God testing Abraham's faith in calling him to offer his only unique son Isaac in sacrifice & Abraham passed the test with a heart set on obedience. James 1:2-4 teaches us that we should count it all joy when we face various trials, because those are meant to produce in us steadfastness, which is perseverance or endurance in faith, which is needed for growth toward godliness & Christlikeness

4. Trust God rather than the world & obey His call on your life (3:9-10, 15, 31)

- When you look at the 3 judges mentioned in this chapter, only Othniel seems to be exemplary & we don't know much about him other than being from Judah, Caleb's nephew (who became his son-in-law) & the Lord's Spirit being with him in war
- But what about Ehud & Shamgar? Ehud was a Benjamite, one of the tribes which failed to drive out the Jebusites from Jerusalem (1:21). Ehud was deceptive. Shamgar only gets one verse but his mother's name was Anath, named after the Canaanite goddess of war—his background was full of false worship & apostasy
- When we think like the world, we expect God to call the smartest & strongest & best-looking, but the Lord often calls the weak & unassuming to be His servants.
- If He has placed a certain call on your life for ministry or missions or service, don't make excuses why you can't do it or why He should choose someone else, because He called YOU & wants you to OBEY Him
- How many of you did your homework this week to thank a fire & rescue worker? I saw a few of you post pictures on social media with #Heroes #FirstBaptistSweetwater. This week I want you to thank medical professionals (doctors, nurses, pharmacists, vets) with a word of gratitude or a card/email or a small gift. Take a picture with them & post to social media with the same hashtags

Conc. This chapter opened with references to the false gods Baal & Ashtaroath, which are the sun-good & moon-goddess of the Canaanites, but Baal could also refer to the storm-god, much like Thor is in Norse mythology. All these false gods supposedly had powers over certain elements, but Jesus Christ proved power over storms by calming the storms, turning water into wine, healing the blind, casting out demons, raising the dead & so much more. Unlike the false gods of legend & lore, we know Jesus walked the earth, died sacrificially on a cruel cross & rose from the dead to prove He is Lord, the real Hero of the Bible. Will you trust Him today?