

October 5, 2025 (Lesson 5)

ISRAEL'S SINFULNESS; GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

1. **Pattern of Defection and Deliverance** (Judges 2:10-23)
2. **The Lord's Spirit Anoints Othniel** (Judges 3:5-11)
3. **Ehud Conquers Moab and Leads Israel** (Judges 3:12-30)

Central Truth: Christians must hold firmly to faith in Christ.

Focus: Recognize the deadliness of sin and gratefully respond to God's faithfulness with obedience.

Evangelism Emphasis: Unbelievers can be delivered from eternal death by accepting Christ.

Golden Text: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12).

INTRODUCTION

This week begins a study of the Book of Judges, which is filled with fascinating stories. If you grew up attending church, you learned about Samson and Gideon in Sunday school or VBS. For those of us who are older, we viewed flannelgraph stories and filmstrips based on Judges. The accounts in this book are a mixed bag. There are stories of God's faithfulness and miracles He performed in ancient Israel. Yet, sadly there are many accounts of the faithlessness of Israel.

The single verse that sums up much of this period of Israel's history is found near the end of the book: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (21:25 NKJV). Sadly, we live in a period much like that of Judges. Many people no longer believe in absolute truth. We hear ridiculous statements like, "My truth is not your truth." Morals and ethical values are viewed as relative to particular people and specific circumstances. We have abandoned faith in a sovereign God ("there was no king"), and every person does what they think is "right in their own eyes." For this reason, it is important that we study this ancient book with modern application.

1. PATTERN OF DEFECTION AND DELIVERANCE

A. Arousing the Lord's Anger (Judges 2:10-15)

¹⁰ And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. ¹¹ And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim: ¹² And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger.

Under Joshua, Israel entered into a renewed covenant with the Lord. At the heart of this covenant was a commitment to reject all idols and serve the one true God (Josh. 24:22-24). That generation faithfully observed the covenant and served God (Judg. 2:7). However, when those leaders who had served the Lord with Joshua died, there arose a new generation (v. 10). Two things marked this generation. First, they “knew not the Lord.” This does not mean they had no knowledge of who God is. Rather, they had abandoned their relationship with Him, no longer loving or following Him. Second, they had no personal knowledge of God’s past mighty “works.” The generation of Joshua knew firsthand the deeds of the Lord. Many of them were youths in Egypt and eyewitnesses of the Exodus. They had seen the powerful hand of God. This new generation only knew these things as stories. Without personal experience, they may have discounted these stories as only myths or fables.

Forgetting the true God caused them to turn to false gods. Emile Cammerts wrote, “The first effect of not believing in God is to believe in anything.” This was true of Israel at this time. They rejected the living God and gave allegiance to idols made of wood, stone, and metal. They violated their fathers’ covenant with the Lord and engaged in the practices the covenant prohibited, worshiping false gods (see Josh. 24:14-15). Thus, the people once beloved of the Lord became His enemy, and He turned against them. Joshua had warned them this would happen (vv. 19-20). The account of Israel during this period is largely a record of how this played out—apostasy, oppression, suffering, repentance, and then deliverance by God—until the next time.

In seeking after false gods, the Israelites especially followed “Baal and Ashtaroth” (Judg. 2:13). *Baal* was a popular god among the Canaanites and Phoenicians. He was also worshiped in Aram (Syria) under the name *Hadad*. He was a fertility god, and it was believed he gave life to the land, specifically ensuring abundant crops. He was associated with the bull, an ancient symbol of fertility. His worship included prostitution and the sacrifice of children. *Ashtoreth* (singular of *Ashtaroth*) was a goddess associated with love, fertility, and war. She was the consort of Baal, and the two were often worshiped together. She was associated with the planet Venus, the evening star. Her temple rituals were usually sexual in nature (see 1 Kings 14:24; 2 Kings 23:7).

As a result of their idolatry, the Lord’s anger was “hot against Israel” (Judg. 2:14). God’s righteous and jealous anger blazed in response to Israel’s sins. The people God had purchased for Himself (Ex. 15:13; Ps. 74:2) would now be “sold” into slavery and bondage to new masters—the kings of foreign nations (see Judg. 2:14). The children of Israel, who had just one generation before experienced victory after victory under Joshua, “could no longer resist their enemies” (v. 14 CSB). Whenever they went out to battle their enemies, “they suffered greatly” (v. 15 CSB).

§ *Why do you suppose the Israelites became ignorant of God and His great works? How can we avoid this terrible error?*

B. Stubbornness Brings Suffering (Judges 2:16-23)

¹⁶ Nevertheless the Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.

¹⁸ And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the Lord because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them. ¹⁹ And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way.

Despite Israel's repeated pattern of disobedience, God patiently looked out for their welfare. The Book of Judges demonstrates to us the great mercy and compassion of the Lord, even for a rebellious people. Every time the people grew tired of their oppression and turned to God, the Lord would raise up a "judge." These individuals did not deal exclusively with legal matters, although they did administer justice according to the Law. A judge was also a civic leader and usually a military leader. Indeed, most of the judges became battle-hardened veterans. As long as a judge was alive, the people tended to follow the Lord, but when a judge died, the people would once again lapse into apostasy (Judg. 2:18-19).

In describing the people's rebellion against God, the writer says, "they went a whoring after other gods" (v. 17). Why such a graphic description? In the Scriptures, Israel is repeatedly pictured as the bride of the Lord, especially in the Books of the Prophets (note Hos. 2). Therefore, when Israel violated its covenant by worshiping idols, this was seen as spiritual adultery. This was especially true in Baal worship. The term *baal*, meaning "lord" or "master," was often used by Hebrew women to refer to their husbands (see 1 Peter 3:6). Therefore, it was both tragic and ironic that Israel would reject her true spouse (the Lord) and seek after a false master (Baal).

The consequences of Israel's stubborn rebellion were suffering, harassment, and bondage at the hands of their enemies—the peoples they should have conquered. This suffering is evident in their "groanings" under their captors (Judg. 2:18). They were made to suffer the same type of oppression they had endured in Egypt, where they also groaned in agony (Ex. 2:24; 3:9). Their idolatry had returned them to the condition God had delivered them from many years before.

God's judgment upon them was they would have to constantly suffer strife and trouble from the surrounding nations (Judg. 2:21-23). God had promised to give Israel victory over all their enemies,

but they had broken the covenant. They would have to endure the harsh and painful consequences of their sin repeatedly for years to come.

Blunt Answer

A rather sanctimonious yet hypocritical deacon was trying to impress on his Sunday school class the importance of living a consistent Christian life. He asked them, “Why do people call me a Christian?” No one answered for a moment. Then one boy timidly replied, “Maybe it’s because they don’t know you.”

2. THE LORD’S SPIRIT ANOINTS OTHNIEL

A. Eight Years of Slavery (Judges 3:5-8)

⁵ And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites: ⁶ And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods. ⁷ And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot the Lord their God, and served Baalim and the groves. ⁸ Therefore the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Chushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Chushan-rishathaim eight years.

Chapters 1 and 2 of Judges are largely a review of the situation after the death of Joshua and the beginning of the period of the judges. Now we begin the actual record of the judges. The first is a man named *Othniel*. But before we tell of him, we must lay some background.

God had withdrawn His promise to drive out the nations before Israel. Now, Israel was surrounded by enemies and also lived among various peoples still abiding in Canaan. That is the situation described in Judges 3:5. Pagan nations that should have been conquered were still in residence in the land, and their evil influence was impactful.

Israel’s first act of rebellion was to intermarry their children with the people of the land (v. 6). This was in direct disobedience to the Law of God (Deut. 7:3) and the instruction of Joshua (Josh. 23:12). God had specifically named these nations in His prohibition against intermarriage with them

(Deut. 7:1). Since the family is the basic unit of human society, what happens in the family affects everything else. The tragic effects of intermarriage with idolatrous peoples would plague Israel throughout its history. This is nowhere more evident than in the life of Solomon (1 Kings 11:1-9). Christians today must consider carefully their choice of a lifelong mate and not become “unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor. 6:14-16).

Their next step of rebellion was to enter into active worship of these nations’ false gods. Judges 3:7 tells us they specifically honored *Baalim* (plural of *Baal*). Baal was worshiped in a number of different forms, using various names. For example, there was *Baal-berith* (“lord of the covenant,” 8:33) and *Baal-zebub* (“lord of the flies,” 2 Kings 1:2-3). The word *groves* refers to *Ashtoreth* (Judg. 3:7). She was often represented by a sacred pole. Worshiping the Asherah poles was a common sin among later Israelites (1 Kings 14:15; 2 Kings 17:10-11).

As a result, God’s anger blazed out against Israel (Judg. 2:8). He “sold” them into the hands of the king of Mesopotamia, named *Chushan-rishathaim*. Mesopotamia was a distant land to the east, between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. This king came a long way to subdue Israel. The king must have been extremely evil, because his name means “Chusan, the doubly wicked.” This was probably a Hebrew wordplay on some form of his actual name. This double-wicked king held Israel in bondage for eight years.

§ *What are the biggest challenges Christians face today living in a pluralistic society?*

B. Forty Years of Rest (Judges 3:9-11)

⁹ And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother. ¹⁰ And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the Lord delivered Chushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushan-rishathaim.

The children of Israel suffered under King Chushan-rishathaim. In desperation, they cried out to the Lord, who heard them, showing His great mercy. The Scriptures tell us God will hear the cries of the righteous (Pss. 34:17; 145:19), but He does not listen to the prayers of the wicked (Prov. 15:29; John 9:31). For God to listen with compassion to these rebellious people is a testimony to His goodness.

In response, God raised up a deliverer named *Othniel*, the nephew of faith-filled Caleb (Judg. 3:9). Othniel had already proven himself to be a courageous warrior by conquering the city of Debir (1:11-13). His name means “God is my strength” or “lion of God.” He was a brave and successful military leader, and a fitting successor to Joshua.

When “the Spirit of the Lord came upon [Othniel],” he “went out to war” against the king of Mesopotamia (3:10). We have no details of the battle, but Othniel overcame his enemy quickly. Like a lion, he overcame his foe with apparent ease. After this victory, the land was at rest for the next forty years (v. 11). During this time, Othniel served as a judge, leading Israel as effectively in peacetime as he had in war.

There are several lessons we can learn from the life of Othniel. *First, the Spirit of the Lord came on Othniel.* He may have been a brave fighter in his own right, but Othniel accomplished his victory over the king of Mesopotamia through the power of the Spirit. This has been the case for God’s people throughout history: The Spirit of God brings victory. This was true in the Old Testament, and it is even truer since Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). The power of the Spirit is essential for effective service to God.

Second, we catch a glimpse of the importance of family. Othniel came to prominence partially as a result of being related to Caleb—one of only two spies (along with Joshua) who believed Israel would be successful in the conquest of Canaan (Num. 13:30). Caleb lived through the four decades of

wilderness wandering, and then conquered his own inheritance in the Promised Land (Josh. 14:6-15). We have to believe “Uncle Caleb” must have made a powerful impact upon the life of his nephew, Othniel.

Third, God does not need celebrities, glamorous people, or the rich and famous to accomplish His will. We know little about Othniel; his life is summed up in a few verses. We don’t know anything about his appearance, intelligence, or personality. We only know he trusted God, and through God’s anointing, Othniel brought about a great victory. He then ruled Israel in peace for many years.

Appreciating Deliverance

Nobody appreciates deliverance like those who have nearly been destroyed.—Beth Moore

3. EHUD CONQUERS MOAB AND LEADS ISRAEL

A. A Left-Handed Deliverer (Judges 3:12-25)

¹⁴ So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years. ¹⁵ But when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded: and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab.

²⁰ And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting in a summer parlour, which he had for himself alone. And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat. ²¹ And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly.

After Othniel’s death, Israel turned from the Lord. The Scripture says they “did evil” (v. 12), referring to idolatry. As a result of their sin, God raised up Eglon, king of Moab. Moab was a neighbor of Israel, located to the southeast. They were descendants of Lot (Gen. 19:36-37) and distant kin to the Israelites. The Moabites were constantly in conflict with the Israelites. They were also idolaters. Their chief god was *Chemosh*, whose worship required child sacrifice (2 Kings 3:26-27).

Eglon formed a coalition with Ammon and Amalek, traditional enemies of the Israelites (Judg. 3:13). The Ammonites were also descendants of Lot, and often allied with Moab. The Amalekites

were a nomadic, desert people. Working with these two hostile nations, Eglon conquered the Trans-Jordanian tribes (those living to the east of the Jordan River). He then crossed over to the “City of Palms” (Jericho), which may have been partially inhabited by this time. According to the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, Eglon built a palace at Jericho—likely a wooden fortress. Then for eighteen years, Israel was under bondage to Eglon (v. 14).

Suffering under the oppression of foreign rule, “Israel cried unto the Lord” (v. 15). This implies they acknowledged their sin and turned from idolatry. God heard their cries and responded with a deliverer, Ehud, from the tribe of Benjamin. The text says he was left-handed, which would prove significant. Apparently, left-handedness was a genetic trait among the Benjamites (see Judg. 20:16; 1 Chron. 12:2), which is ironic because *Benjamin* means “son of my right hand” (Gen. 35:18).

Ehud went to see Eglon in his palace. The Scripture says he had a “present” for him (Judg. 3:17). This was likely the tribute Eglon demanded from Israel. This may have been crops or livestock, and thus required several men to carry it (v. 18). Ehud used this tribute to gain access to the king, but his goal was assassination. He prepared for this by having a two-edged dagger that was about 18 inches long (v. 16). Ehud’s left-handedness served him well in this endeavor. Most right-handed people carried a knife or sword on their left side so they could draw it out easily. But being left-handed, Ehud placed the dagger under his robe on his right thigh. If Eglon’s guards searched for a weapon, they probably would not have looked there.

Ehud brought the tribute to the king in his palace. Eglon received the tribute, and then Ehud dismissed those who had carried it in (v. 18). Ehud left the palace and traveled as far as the “quarries” (v. 19), a word literally meaning “carved stones.” These were probably pagan idols. They have symbolic significance, since Ehud turned away from the place of idols, even as Israel turned away from idolatry and back to God. Ehud went to the king’s “summer parlor” (v. 20). This was an

upper room on the palace roof. It was common to build such rooms with lattice walls open to breezes (cf. 2 Kings 1:2), offering relief from summer heat. Ehud approached the king with a “secret message” to tell him (Judg. 3:19 CSB). Intrigued, Eglon dismissed his servants. Ehud then declared he had a message from God” (v. 20).

The “message” was then delivered as Ehud quickly drew out the dagger and plunged it into Eglon’s stomach. The description of this is rather graphic. Eglon was an obese man (v. 17), and Ehud pushed the blade in so deeply that not only the blade but also the handle entered the king (vv. 21-22). The fat closed in around the dagger, wedging it in so tightly that it could not be removed. Then, the contents of the king’s bowels gushed out on the floor.

Ehud quickly exited this latticed room, locking the door behind him. After a time, the king’s servants became concerned about him. They found the door locked and were afraid to enter. They rationalized the king wanted to be by himself for personal reasons. The phrase “he covereth his feet” (v. 24) may mean Eglon was relaxing, perhaps with his feet propped up. However, more likely, the servants thought he was in the royal chamber relieving himself (cf. 1 Sam. 24:3). No wonder they were reluctant to disturb him! However, after a while, it became so awkward that the servants opened the door, only to discover their dead king.

Little to Say

Honest and courageous people have very little to say about their courage or their honesty.—

Hosea Ballou

B. Eighty Years of Peace (Judges 3:26-30)

²⁷ And it came to pass, when he was come, that he blew a trumpet in the mountain of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mount, and he before them. ²⁸ And he said unto them, Follow after me: for the Lord hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over.

³⁰ So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years.

Ehud escaped from the palace and traveled to the highlands of Ephraim, situated north of Jerusalem. From a mountaintop there, Ehud blew a trumpet—a common signaling device for ancient armies, calling the people of Israel to gather to him. He encouraged the people to attack the Moabites, assuring them God had given their enemies into their hands. Next, Ehud made a strategic move to take control of the fords of the Jordan River. This effectively trapped the Moabites who were already in Israel, and prevented any reinforcements to come from Moab. Israel destroyed the army, killing “about ten thousand men” (v. 29). These Moabite warriors are described as brave, yet “lusty” (v. 29), literally “fat.” It is the same word used to describe the obesity of Eglon. Perhaps these men, probably handpicked soldiers, had grown lazy and fat in enjoying the abundance of the land. Whatever the case, Moab was utterly defeated, and the oppression of Israel ended. After this, “the land had peace for eighty years” (v. 30 CSB).

§ *How did Ehud glorify God (v. 28), and what should we learn from his example?*

HOLD FIRMLY TO FAITH

Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously said, “Only the obedient believe.” He was basically saying genuine faith will always be demonstrated through our acts of obedience. To be a follower of God requires faithful obedience—a lesson Israel was very slow to learn. The pattern of disobedience, repentance, and then disobedience again that was evident in the period of the judges was repeated throughout the history of Israel. We would do well to learn this lesson for ourselves. We must hold firmly to our faith in Christ and live it out in consistent obedience.

Daily Devotions

M. Consequences of Sin (Daniel 9:1-11)

- T. Fasting and Deliverance (Isaiah 58:6-12)
- W. Repent and Live (Ezekiel 18:30-32)
- T. Repent and Receive God's Gift (Acts 2:37-41)
- F. God Fulfills His Promises (Acts 3:17-26)
- S. Citizens of Heaven (Philippians 3:17-21)