

3. Wanted: Ordinary people

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The world is filled with ordinary people. They were born, grew up in a typical neighborhood, got married and they raise their own children. Out of these ordinary people, someone step out during the challenging time and take a leader's role. For that we think that they were natural born leaders. That is the worldly way to look at leaders.

The Bible is filled with great heroes and heroines. They are not natural born leaders in many cases. They were obedient to God's call and filled with the Spirit of Living God and acted upon God's call in a complete dependency. That made them heroes, nothing else.

When God goes to war, He usually chooses the most unlikely soldiers, hands them the most unusual weapons, and accomplishes through them the most unpredictable results.

We are going to see three individuals who became judges in Chapter Three tonight.

A. DOING WHAT THEY SHOULD NOT DO

Judges 3:1-6 Now these are the nations which the Lord left, that He might test Israel by them, that is, all who had not known any of the wars in Canaan 2 (this was only so that the generations of the children of Israel might be taught to know war, at least those who had not formerly known it), 3 namely, five lords of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites who dwelt in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal Hermon to the entrance of Hamath. 4 And they were left, that He might test Israel by them, to know whether they would obey the commandments of the Lord, which He had commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses. 5 Thus the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 6 And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons; and they served their gods.

God left these Canaanite nations behind because Israel was not faithful in driving them out. In the same way, we can say to a person who has "pagan territory" in his life, "the reason is because you allow it to be there." And, at the most basic level, that is true.

God doesn't just instantly change every area of our lives the way He wants. God never violates human responsibility, but He does rule and overrule in the affairs of individuals and nations to accomplish His great purposes on this earth.

As long as we're in this world, God's people are involved in a spiritual battle against satan and his armies. Satan and his cohorts are doing their best to ensnare us to their traps and entice us to sin. No one likes the struggle against sin, but the battle is good for us. The symbol of Christianity is a cross, not a feather bed and rose garden.

We find here that the Israelites had intermarried with the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. They married into all the tribes, even though God had strictly forbidden it.

What led to their sin was subtle:

1) Israel failed to conquer the neighboring tribes.

These surviving nations adopted a “good neighbor” policy toward Israel that eventually defeated Israel from within. Sometimes satan comes as a lion to devour, but often he comes as an angel of light to deceive.

2) Intermarriage led them into sin.

There is nothing wrong with romance, but we have a terrible habit of falling in love with people or things that we have no business falling in love with.

Proverbs 4:23 Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.

Contrary to God’s law, these Jewish men married pagan wives, and Jewish women married pagan husbands. These idolaters gradually stole the hearts of their mates from worshiping Jehovah God to worshiping false gods. King Solomon made this same mistake. After all, when you marry outside the will of God, you have to do something, such as compromise that brings your spiritual condition down to keep peace in the family.

B. OTHNIEL, THE FIRST JUDGE

Judges 3:7-11 So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs. 8 Therefore the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the children of Israel served Cushan-Rishathaim eight years. 9 When the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the children of Israel, who delivered them: Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother. 10 The Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the Lord delivered Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-Rishathaim. 11 So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

God gave Israel just what they wanted. They didn’t want to serve God, so He allowed them to be in bondage to a pagan king. Israel reaped exactly what they sowed.

Hosea 8:7a They sow the wind, And reap the whirlwind.

The name of the King of Mesopotamia ‘Cushan-Rishathaim’ means “doubly wicked Cushan,” which may have been a nickname that his enemies gave him.

God never allows His people to sin successfully. Their sin will either destroy them or it will invite the chastening hand of God. If the history of Israel teaches the today’s church anything it’s the obvious lesson that righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people and ultimately our God.

However, there’s no evidence that the people repented of their sins when they cried out to God for help. But the Lord responded to their cry and gave them a deliverer. It was the Exodus experience all over again.

How gracious and compassionate our Lord is! When the children of Israel cried unto Him for deliverance, He raised up Othniel to be the first judge. There is no great criticism leveled against him. He saved his people from the oppression of Cushan-Rishathaim.

Othniel did not become the leader of Israel because of his outstanding ability but because he was Caleb's nephew and had married Caleb's daughter. Yet God used him. It is amazing what kind of men God will use. Maybe that is the reason He can use you and me.

C. EHUD, THE SECOND JUDGE

Judges 3:12-14 And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord strengthened Eglon king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord. 13 Then he gathered to himself the people of Ammon and Amalek, went and defeated Israel, and took possession of the City of Palms. 14 So the children of Israel served Eglon king of Moab eighteen years.

Unlike Moses, who appointed Joshua to lead Israel, the judges didn't have the authority to name a successor. When God called men and women to serve as judges, they obeyed, did His work, and then passed from the scene. One would hope that their godly influence would make a lasting difference in the spiritual life of the nation, but such wasn't the case. No sooner was a judge off the scene than the people were back to worshipping Baal and forsaking the Lord.

The children of Israel suffered 8 years of bondage before they cried out to the Lord in the days of Othniel. But here they endure 18 stubborn years of bondage before they cried out to the Lord.

Judges 3:15 But when the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for them: Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man. By him the children of Israel sent tribute to Eglon king of Moab.

This shows the mercy of God. When Israel repeatedly drifted from God, He had every right to cast them off completely. Yet He still responded when they finally did call on Him for deliverance.

In the ancient world left-handed people were often forced to become right-handed. This made Ehud's standing as a left-handed man more unusual.

God is willing to use anyone, not well-educated, not well-equipped, not well-financed people. I am not saying that all those well-to-do people are ungodly, but God is looking for someone whose heart is loyal to Him, not someone with everything together.

2 Chron 16:9a For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.

God is looking for someone who is willing and obedient to Him and He will equip the person for the task. By doing so, the person cannot take credit.

A couple of great examples are Dwight L. Moody and G. Campbell Morgan. D. L. Moody goes down in history as one of the greatest evangelists and G. Campbell Morgan as one of the finest Bible expositors of his time. D. L. Moody had little formal education and he was a former shoe salesman. When G. Campbell Morgan preached his first sermon in a particular church, he was turned down by the pulpit committee. They told him they did not think he could ever become a preacher.

Ehud was God's choice for this time and he was willing to be used by God.

Judges 3:16-30 Now Ehud made himself a dagger (it was double-edged and a cubit in length) and fastened it under his clothes on his right thigh. 17 So he brought the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. (Now Eglon was a very fat man.) 18 And when he had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who had carried the tribute. 19 But he himself turned back from the stone images that were at Gilgal, and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." He said, "Keep silence!" And all who attended him went out from him. 20 And Ehud came to him (now he was sitting upstairs in his cool private chamber). Then Ehud said, "I have a message from God for you." So he arose from his seat. 21 Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. 22 Even the hilt went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the dagger out of his belly; and his entrails came out. 23 Then Ehud went out through the porch and shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them. 24 When he had gone out, Eglon's servants came to look, and to their surprise, the doors of the upper room were locked. So they said, "He is probably attending to his needs in the cool chamber." 25 So they waited till they were embarrassed, and still he had not opened the doors of the upper room. Therefore they took the key and opened them. And there was their master, fallen dead on the floor. 26 But Ehud had escaped while they delayed, and passed beyond the stone images and escaped to Seirah. 27 And it happened, when he arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the mountains of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mountains; and he led them. 28 Then he said to them, "Follow me, for the Lord has delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand." So they went down after him, seized the fords of the Jordan leading to Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross over. 29 And at that time they killed about ten thousand men of Moab, all stout men of valor; not a man escaped. 30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for eighty years.

As much cunning and courage as Ehud had, he could not do the work by himself. It was essential for brave and faithful men to rally around him. Ehud led, but he had to have followers.

In the same way, God raises up leaders in the church, but they can't do the work by themselves. The whole body needs to work together.

Ehud's cunning and courage, coupled with Israel's faithful following of a leader, brought Israel's longest period of freedom under the 400-year period of the Judges.

D. SHAMGAR, THE THIRD JUDGE

Judges 3:31 After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed six hundred men of the Philistines with an ox goad; and he also delivered Israel.

Only one verse is devoted to Shamgar. Judges 5:6-7 indicates that he was contemporary with Deborah and Barak. "Son of Anath" may mean that he was from the town of Beth Anath in Naphtali, which was also the tribe Barak came from.

What was significant about Shamgar was the weapon that he used. An ox goad was a strong pole about eight feet long. At one end was a sharp metal point for prodding the oxen and at the other end a spade for cleaning the dirt off the plow. It was the closest thing Shamgar could find to a spear because the enemy had confiscated the weapons of the Israelites. I guarantee you that U.S. Navy SEAL would not adopt an ox goad as their primary weapon any time soon.

Here was a man who obeyed God and defeated the enemy even though his resources were limited. Instead of complaining about not possessing a sword or spear, Shamgar gave what he had to the Lord, and the Lord used it mightily.

If the Jews had been asked to vote on a leader, Othniel, Ehud or Shamgar probably would have lost on the first ballot. But they were God's choices, and God used them to set the nation free. Moses was slow of speech and Paul was not imposing in his appearance. But Moses and Paul, like Othniel, Ehud or Shamgar, were men of faith who led others to victory. These three judges turned a disability and whatever they were lacking into a possibility because they depended on the Lord.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) God is looking for men and women who are willing to be used by Him with complete dependency.

Our Lord will equip us if we simply let Him.

2) We must remember that God never allows His people to sin successfully.

Their sin will either destroy them or it will invite the chastening hand of God.