

“LITTLE BROTHER AND SOUTH-PAW”

THE CHURCH AT WAR AND PEACE

JUDGES 3

REV. CHARLES R. BIGGS

In our first sermon Israel had already become the compromised church (see chapter one and sermon “*After the Death of Joshua...the Compromised Church.*”); in our sermon last week, we will learned that the compromised church had already become the *idolatrous church*; today we will learn that the compromised and idolatrous church was at the same time a church at war and peace.

The Israelites were covenantally promised the land. The Israelites were to dwell at peace and bring in God’s Kingdom so that God might rule over His people on earth. In order to achieve this end, Israel was to defeat all of God’s and her enemies. So, once she was in the land of covenant promise, who would be here neighbors?

Other Israelites who were faithful, strong and obedient to God? Right?! Wrong!

ESV Judges 3:5 So the people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

The Israelite “neighbors” were heathen. What’s so bad about that? We as the Church today also live among heathen do we not? Yes, but at this time in redemptive-history we must remember that National Israel was the visible Church. Although it is probably easy for us to compare National Israel to other nations we see around ourselves today, such as America (as some have done!); we are not to do this.

National Israel at that time in redemptive-history was like our visible churches in the New Testament era in which we live which means that their destruction of foreign oppressors and nations was a purification of the Church; they were to war so that there would be purity and peace in God’s “House” or the Church- -God’s Holy Nation (cf. 1 Peter 2:5).

So the analogy we have with the Israel of old is that we as a manifestation of the visible church must not tolerate or allow professing heathen-pagans to be on our church rolls, and we must war against the world, flesh and devil to realize the peace with God we have already obtained in Jesus Christ.

Understand?

Israel lived in the covenant land among the heathen nations. At this time, they were to purify the land in obedience to God because of God’s command to purify the land so that God might ultimately and permanently dwell with His people. Always keep in mind that the goal of the entire Old Testament, and frankly the entire story of redemption is that

God will be the God of His own, and they will dwell in purity and peace, and God will permanently set up His throne in their midst.

So Israel was allowing heathens to be a part of the visible church is the sad note on which chapter 3 of Judges begins. The Bible reminds us in chapter 3 verse 1 that this was the LORD's doing to test and chastise Israel as the Angel of the LORD told the people at Bochim (2:1-3; cf. 2:20-23). As the Angel of the LORD reminded the Israelites that God would be faithful to His covenant promises, so he also said that they would be chastised for their covenant disobedience:

ESV Judges 2:1-3: Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, "I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, ² and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.' But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? ³ So now I say, I will not drive them out before you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, ¹ and their gods shall be a snare to you."

Because the Israelites failed to purify the visible Church, God would chastise his people and the heathen people who were left would be "thorns in their sides" and "their gods shall be a snare to you" (2:1-3). In other words, rather than finding peace-shalom in Canaan, the people of God were directed somewhere else.

God says clearly that the people should look to God for their hope now rather than putting their hope in a piece of property in the Middle East. Another way of saying this is that if the People of God were ever to find peace in the land, they would have to first understand the peace that comes from God alone; they would have to have peace with God through obedience and resisting the sins that so easily beset them and lead them into gross idolatry.

This reminds us of the important truth that we see revealed over time in redemptive history; that if the Land of Canaan was to be possessed and the people were to live at peace, and the land would be pure and sinless so that God could and would dwell with his people, it would have to be a work of God Himself (although there would be better times of peace under the monarchy of David in the future, but even this was a short season of peace in the land).

God would have to cleanse the land- -God would have to save and purify! That's the gospel! *What God's people could never do, God does for us by His grace!* For now, the People of Israel were to live among the heathen, experiencing glimpses of peace when God would raise up a Judge-Savior; but no permanent peace and definitely no permanent purity because of their idolatrous hearts, and so they would have to wait upon the LORD.

Again, the heathen people remained because of Israel's covenant obedience but God is sovereign, and the ultimate reason why the heathen remained is told to us in chapter 3 verses 2 and 4:

ESV Judges 3:2 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.

This passage does not mean that God wanted them to learn warfare in a sort of general kind of way; God wanted Israel to know and understand the reason for the war, and why they were called to fight: to execute God's justice, to seek peace and pursue it, and to purify Israel so that God might dwell in their midst; they were supposed to be seeking rest from their enemies and rest from their labors and bondage to sin so that they could wholly serve and worship God in His Kingdom.

What was the nature and what were the purposes of the war? Several things: (1) That Israel might trust God in whatever circumstances they found themselves; (2) That Israel would realize her deep need of salvation and deliverance not merely from external enemies dwelling about her, but also her desperate problem with the enemy of indwelling sin; and (3) Perhaps most importantly, that the Israelites would know and understand God and his ways of mercy, love and forgiveness- - and that Shalom-Peace came from Him alone! That the Israelites would know and believe the Gospel!

ESV Judges 3:4 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.

Based on these two verses you could say that God chastised Israel for covenant disobedience and allowed their enemies to remain in the land so that Israel would know what the war was for, and all about, and so that God would know Israel, that is whether they truly loved him or not as their God and Savior. Both of these reasons show God's ongoing faithfulness and grace and mercy to His own.

Othniel the Judge

Beginning with Othniel the first judge we begin to see an important pattern in *The Book of Judges*; this pattern will be repeated in various ways, but in chapter 3:7-11 we get a typical pattern (although the pattern sometimes changes throughout the book, and sometimes only a few of these are mentioned in the account of the various judges):

- Israel sins against God (3:7)
- Israel angers God to wrath (3:8)
- Israel is sold into captivity and enslaved or defeated by their enemies (3:8b)
- Israel cries out to the LORD in their bondage (3:9)
- The LORD raises up for them a Judge-Warrior-Savior-Deliverer to redeem them from bondage and captivity (3:9b)
- The Judge delivers and leads Israel by the Spirit of the LORD for a season (3:10)
- The Judge defeats Israel's enemies (3:10b)
- The land rests for an appointed time, a season (3:11a)
- The Judge dies (3:11b)

Because the heathen were left in the land, the People of God not only lived among the people without peace, but they were soon intermarrying among the unbelieving pagans - again, they were becoming Canaanized through marriage:

ESV Judges 3:6 And their daughters they took to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons, and they served their gods.

You can imagine the catechism lesson around the fire each night for the children of those among the Israelites and Canaanites who intermarried: “Who made you?” Mama would say, and baby would respond: “God made me.” And heathen, papa-Canaanite would say: “No, God did not make you, Baal did.” Rather than being *circumcised, baptized, catechized* children who knew and believed in the Living God, they had become Canaanized because of the idolatry and the worldiness of their parents.

“Who made you?” What first was confusion for the child, turned into the later answer: “Who cares?!”

What confusion, what syncretism could come from this? What relativism within families and between peoples when the only peace that could be found within the homes and intermarried communities was the peace of not discussing religious things, or just become relevant and tolerant to any devoted system of religion. The set-apart People of God are on the way to becoming *Canaanized*. As Professor Daniel Block writes:

“Peaceful coexistence with the world leads to cohabitation and alliance with the world, which in turn leads to taking on the religious notions of the world (NAC, pg. 141).

But it would not be the religion of God. In fact, the Bible teaches in chapter 3:7-8:

ESV Judges 3:7-8: 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. ⁸ 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.

The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. In fact, after many years of catechism the children of formerly believing families called upon and served the Baals and the Asheroth.

Who are/were the Baals and the Asheroth in the ancient Near East? Baal was the son of El in the Canaanite pantheon of gods and was considered the god of the storm and the rains and therefore the one who controlled vegetation which meant that the pagans thought that if they were to eat they needed to worship him. Ashtaroht was the consort of Baal and the plural form of Astarte, the goddess of war and fertility (worshipped as Ishtar in Babylon and Anath in Northern Syria).

There would have been real persecution and religious “peer pressure” to worship along with the other pagans especially during times of draught, thin produce years and when

women were not getting pregnant; sometimes the pagans would blame those who exclusively worshipped and served YHWH alone in Israel.

So many in Israel would succumb to YHWH *plus* Baal and Asheroth, and this syncretism (or the mixing of the two worship practices) would lead to more corruption and idolatry in their children (cf. Judges 2:19). In response to the people's outright stubbornness, rebellion and idolatry, God would send the people "back to Egypt" in enslavement. God had redeemed the people from slavery in Egypt; God had redeemed the people from the idolatry and false religious teachings of Egypt; but if the people did not want to listen to God, if they did not want to respond to His redemptive grace, God would send them "back to Egypt".

And so the people were sold this time into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim which means literally "King Cushan of Two Wickednesses"- - this is an evil king or double wickedness! This reveals how God is the LORD of history and all nations serve him to accomplish His sovereign purposes, even if they are not fully aware of it; God is still establishing His Kingdom, His rule and reign over the world.

If the people would not call upon the Name of the LORD, but would rather become enslaved by false idols of the heathen, then the LORD would allow this to happen in order to chastise his people.

The people of Israel deserved eternal enslavement (or at least 400 years as in Egypt) but God only permitted them to serve and be enslaved for eight years because of His grace. When the people of God "came to their sinful senses" they cried out to the True and Living God and implored Him to help Him. The Israelites did not repent and cry out, but they cried out in their difficult and oppressive situation to God who would hear and could help them.

This is grace in that some of the folks in Israel still remembered somehow that only YHWH could save them, and that he was a gracious God abounding in mercy and steadfast love as God had revealed Himself to Moses:

ESV Exodus 34:5-7: The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. ⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, ¹ forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

In fact, God particularly raised up Othniel, Caleb's nephew (Caleb's nephew through Kenaz his younger brother). You will recall that Caleb was the "number one" or first in command under Joshua. Joshua and Caleb were the only two from the Exodus generation of the Israelites to enter the Promised Land after the death of Moses.

Additionally, it was Othniel who won the hand of Caleb's daughter Achsah in the romance of the springs in Judges 1:11-15. The implicit teaching here is that Othniel and

Achsah had remained faithfully obedient to God (or rather, that God had been covenantally faithful to them); their family had remained catechized according to the teachings of the True and Living God only! There was no intermarriage leading to idolatry, unrest, syncretism and relativism in this household!

And God raised up Othniel, a Judge-Savior-Warrior-Deliverer who had remained faithful to God. The Bible teaches us that the Spirit of the LORD was upon him to accomplish His mission of deliverance and salvation and redemption and so another Exodus of God was accomplished by the hand and power of God (Again, only God can save poor sinners! That's the Gospel!). Othniel serves as a paradigmatic model against which the other judges should be interpreted; Othniel is presented as a paradigmatic leader (Block, pg. 149).

Othniel defeated the enemies of God and of Israel, and redeemed Israel again from enslavement, all because of God's power and purpose for His people. It was the LORD who gave King Cushan-rishathaim of Mesopotamia into Othniel's hand (3:10-11).

And the land had rest for forty years (3:11). Israel was hopeful that rest and peace-shalom would one day be hers because of God's covenant promises.

ESV Deuteronomy 12:8-11: "You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes, ⁹ for you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance that the LORD your God is giving you. ¹⁰ But when you go over the Jordan and live in the land that the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and when he gives you rest from all your enemies around, so that you live in safety, ¹¹ then to the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution that you present, and all your finest vow offerings that you vow to the LORD.

And the Bible says that the land did indeed experience rest, albeit was brief:

“So the land had rest forty years...” An entire generation enjoyed God's rest in the land after Othniel's labors (3:11). Why was there no permanent rest; why only 40 years? Because Othniel was unable to continue in office as Moses and Joshua before him. Othniel, the son of Kenaz died (3:11b; cf. Joshua 11:23), and the people would do evil again in the sight of the LORD. Why didn't Israel ever learn of God's grace? Because Othniel could not change their idolatrous hearts to worship and serve God alone.

So when would the People of God live in the land and fully inherit it? When would God give the People of God rest from enemies and they would live in safety? When would God cause His Name to dwell among his people and they would worship Him in Spirit and truth? That day would come, but not yet. There is still more unrest and war; there is still the history of a world fallen into sin and misery that we must be reminded of, of which we are still a part.

Judges reveals the world of sin and misery, the results of the fall, and man's depravity in living color and Vista-Vision wide screen; but God is also revealed as the faithful and

gracious God to His people. God is always powerful to save! Nothing is impossible with God!!

Ehud

But just as soon as God had redeemed the people, the people went a-whoring again after idols, and become friends with the world as adulterers before God (3:12).

Now the story of Ehud is kind of like a story taken from *The Godfather* films. At first glance, we wonder how such a violent scene could be in the Bible and also we wonder how it should teach us of Christ! (see Luke 24:24; 44ff). One commentator described it as “one of those apparently R-rated sections of the Old Testament” (Davis, pg. 57). Another commentator said that the author presents a “colorful and humoresque account” of the confrontation between Israel and the oppressing Moabites” (Block, pg. 156).

One commentator said: “It must be a rare experience to hear a sermon about Ehud and Eglon. I shall not be the only person brought up in a Bible-reading family to have relished since childhood the tale of the left-handed judge and the fat king of Moab. But how often do preachers preach on them?” (Wilcock, *The Message of Judges*, pg. 35).

Yet with all Scripture we understand again that God shows sinfulness “warts and all” and he does indeed point us forward to Christ as he does in this passage (and if you think this passage is a bit violent, you ain’t seen nothin’ yet as we get to chapters 17 and following in *Judges*). We should also understand that God’s Word gives to us a longer reading and thus focus on Ehud as judge even more so than Othniel in 3:7-11 and Shamgar who gets only a mention in 3:31. It would be right to say that Othniel and Shamgar only provide a narrative frame for Ehud’s time as judge (see Wilcock, pg. 36ff).

There is a reason why Ehud is focused upon so intently the author of *Judges* under the inspiration of God’s Spirit- -He and his story are very important for us to know!

The LORD God in response to Israel’s stubbornness and rebellion and idolatry strengthens another king against Israel (3:12b). The King is Eglon of Moab “the fat” (3:17b), and he was able to march against banners unfurled, and fight with the Ammonites and the Amalekites (more unbelieving heathen) in order to defeat the Israelites (2:13).

Israel had warred against Moab (the Moabites descended from Abraham’s nephew Lot), the Ammonites (the Ammonites being the people of one of the sons of Moab), and the Amalekites before (see the especially Numbers and Deuteronomy in the *Five Books of Moses*).

Years earlier in redemptive-history, Moab actually had heard of God’s defeat of the Egyptians at the Red Sea and been filled with fright as to what the Israelites could do with God on their side; rumor of Israel’s God had been heard and Moab feared for their lives.

ESV Exodus 15:14-16: The peoples have heard; they tremble; pangs have seized the inhabitants of Philistia. ¹⁵ Now are the chiefs of Edom dismayed; trembling seizes the leaders of Moab; all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. ¹⁶ Terror and dread fall upon them; because of the greatness of your arm, they are still as a stone, till your people, O LORD, pass by, till the people pass by whom you have purchased.

ESV Numbers 22:3 And Moab was in great dread of the people, because they were many. Moab was overcome with fear of the people of Israel.

But that was then...and this is NOW. Now the Israelites have turned from obeying and following the LORD their God and He has raised up Eglon, fat King of Moab to defeat them along with their other enemies the Ammonites and the Amalekites!

Now we do not want to miss the satire, irony and theological purpose of Eglon as a character in the narrative. He is an enemy of God; he is a particularly “fat” enemy of God and his name means “bull” or “calf” We should understand that from the beginning of the narrative the author under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wanted God’s people to comically see a fat “bull” or “calf” going to the slaughter, a picture of God’s enemies who oppose Him!

Yet God’s people shouldn’t miss the rebuke for them as well: God’s people are living among these kind of people; God’s people are worshipping and serving their gods, and now they are the slaves of such people- -there is no room for laughter, although it would be hilarious if it were not so sad!

Not only did fat King Eglon defeat the Israelites, but he particularly took possession of the city of palms. The “City of Palms” was Jericho where Joshua had the first great victory for God’s people when entering the Promised Land of Canaan- -now the city belonged again to the enemies of God’s people! Now God’s enemies had marched around the walls of Canaan- -and the “WALLS FELL DOWN” and he took possession of this city (3:13).

Israel’s first memory of victory at Jericho was now a long-forgotten memory as they are now enslaved at the very place that they had faith to overthrow in previous generations.

And when things were NOT going as they desired, the People of Israel once again cried unto the LORD. Again, by God’s grace, there was a remnant of the people who knew that YHWH was the Living and True God and that He could indeed save the people. For their sake, God raised up Ehud a Judge-Savior-Warrior-Deliverer, who was a “South-Paw” or left-handed Benjaminite (3:15).

It is significant that Ehud was left-handed. In Israelite thinking the right hand was significant of power, glory and blessing as found in the following verses:

ESV Isaiah 62:8 The LORD has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm: "I will not again give your grain to be food for your enemies, and foreigners shall not drink your wine for which you have labored; ⁹ but those who garner it shall eat it and praise the LORD, and those who gather it shall drink it in the courts of my sanctuary."

ESV Exodus 15:6 Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy.

ESV Psalm 16:11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

KJV Psalm 110:1 <A Psalm of David.> The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.

The right hand is how God blessed or cursed the people; the right hand is the way God judged the people; the right hand is the place of rest and peace-shalom for God's people; the right hand is where God's Messianic King would one day eternally sit. But here, at this time in redemptive-history, it is not the right hand that is the focus of God's redemptive work! Rather, it is God's right hand working through a man who was left-handed.

What is unique of Ehud as a Judge-Warrior-Savior-Deliverer is that he is a "South-Paw", or he is left-handed revealing that God in His sovereignty works according to His wisdom and will and oftentimes surprises his people (which will become clearer as we progress through *Judges*). The people might expect God to work on their behalf by using right-handed folks, but how could a left hand have any significance at all?

Think about it, if the people of God had just come to recognize God's pattern in their sins and God's response of raising up judges as in the account of Othniel (3:7-11), they might have come to continue to trample on God's grace and never realize his mercy; the people may have just come to expect God to deliver them, so God reveals through Ehud that the way he delivers might be through what most would think weak as well as unique.

Ehud would not be like Othniel, but he would represent God nonetheless and show God's right hand of power, glory and blessing as he delivered the Israelites. Left-handedness for Ehud meant that he was either born this way (as other Benjaminites in 20:16) or that his good right hand had been maimed, deformed or paralyzed in some way. It is interesting that the name "Benjamin" means literally in Hebrew "son of the right hand" (see also 1 Chronicles 12:1-2).

The plan was for Ehud to bring a feigned tribute to the tyrant King Eglon of Moab who had defeated and enslaved Israel (there is a play on words in the Hebrew of 3:15 that says that "Israel sent tribute ***by the hand*** [of Ehud] to Eglon...")

Ehud's right hand was carrying a tribute, but it would be something else that Ehud's left hand would bring other than tribute: judgment). Hidden beneath Ehud's clothes, on his right thigh, was sheathed a wide and powerful 18 inch, two-edged sword that was designed to put an end to King Eglon of Moab (3:16-17).

When Ehud arrived where Eglon had set up his throne at Jericho he postured himself humbly before Eglon and presented the feigned tribute before his "fatness". As the

tribute is being received by Eglon, Ehud gains his confidence by dismissing his entourage that has accompanied him (3:18). For Ehud had a message of great importance- -but it was a secret one. Playing into Ehud's hands and according to plan, the fat King Eglon dismisses his attendants who stand guard in his noble presence (3:19).

And now the two of them are alone, face to face, Ehud and Eglon. Ehud tells the King of Moab that God has a message for him and he arose from his seat before Eglon, approached his ear in order to whisper the secret message, while his left hand is drawing sword (3:19-20).

Now you must picture a left-handed Judge-Savior-Warrior-Deliverer approaching the king using his left hand to unsheath his sword on his right thigh. The message from God for King Eglon: **Death and Judgment!**

The next think King Eglon realizes is that an 18 inch double-edged sword is in his gut - his belly; his stomach is receiving the very blow and punishment of God through Ehud. The sword is thrust so deeply into the fat king that the hilt of the sword (where the hand is protected from the blade at the handle) is even thrust into his stomach. What great force and power for a left-handed man to insert sword so deeply- -and what a mortal wound!

Ehud left the sword in the fat king's belly until the dung came out and the king was left in a heap of blood and filth (3:22). I know, I know, it's hard to look upon- -gaze your eyes toward God if you must in order to see God's just punishment in this! How heinous the punishment, how gross as we might say, but how great a sinner was King Eglon who deserved not just this, but eternal wrath from God himself. In each of the Judges of Israel we must not forget to see the hand of God in His righteous Judgment as THE JUDGE.

How great was King Eglon's sin against God and His people that he deserved so much more torment and punishment than a mere 18 inch sword slicing through his noble and fat stomach! King Eglon was an anti-Christ, anti-God king who ruled over the people that God had claimed as His own.

King Eglon had challenged God's sovereignty and had ruled unrighteously and unjustly before God and His people; he was in short an idolatrous king (thus the reason why the text tells us that there were idols near Gilgal allowed in his reign, 3:19). But there is another aspect of God's judgment here we dare not miss; when Joshua conquered Jericho, he pronounced a curse on anyone who would rebuild it (Joshua 6:26-27:):

Joshua laid an oath on them at that time, saying, "Cursed before the LORD be the man who rises up and rebuilds this city, Jericho. "At the cost of his firstborn shall he lay its foundation, and at the cost of his youngest son shall he set up its gates." ²⁷ So the LORD was with Joshua, and his fame was in all the land.

The curse eventually comes upon King Eglon and he suffers God's "left-handed" right hand of power and judgment through Ehud. You might also remember Balaam's

prophecy to Balak who was an earlier king of Moab, where it was prophesied by Balaam by the Spirit of God (Numbers 24:2, 8):

ESV Numbers 24:8 God brings him out of Egypt and is for him like the horns of the wild ox; he shall eat up the nations, his adversaries, and shall break their bones in pieces and pierce them through with his arrows.

What is curiously funny here is that Ehud leaves after killing the King- -and the guards and attendants of the king think that he must have dismissed them because he needed to relieve himself or as we would say euphemistically, he needed to go to the bathroom or restroom (3:23-25). The servants even waited outside the door until they were embarrassed thinking that the king must have been caught up in one of his favorite books or magazines perhaps?! ☺

After mustering up a bit of courage, the servants got the key to the “royal restroom” or “bathroom of the king” and opened it, finding the fat king dead as a doornail on the floor in front of his royal toilet (3:25)!! As Block writes: “All that remained of Eglon, the fattened calf, the mighty ruler of Moab, was a corpse and pile of feces” (pg. 168).

Once the leader was dead, Ehud secured his left and right flanks of Israelites, unfurled the banner of the LORD and led the people against the Moabites. Ehud as Moses and Joshua and Caleb before him remind the people of the covenantal words that “God is with them” and he says: “...the LORD has given your enemies the Moabites into your hand” (3:28).

The Moabites were prevented from coming over or passing over the Jordan and settling permanently into the Promised Land (3:28). Strong, able-bodied men were destroyed and not one escaped –Mission accomplished (3:29). Full destruction, *Herem* warfare was accomplished as God had told the people through Moses and Joshua.

Moab was subdued and destroyed under the hand of the People of God as a testimony to God’s power and greatness. Just as God had destroyed the Egyptians as testimony and witness to God’s power, even raising up Pharaoh just to show his might and power (see Romans 9), so God raised up King Eglon of Moab in order to show his power and might, and to declare to the world that God alone can redeem and save!

The Bible tells us that the land again enjoyed rest; this time the rest was for eighty years (3:30b). Not merely one generation (40 years) as with Othniel, but now two generations (80 years). Will this be permanent? Will God’s people live at rest and peace-shalom in God’s presence now?

Remember as we learned earlier that the rest that God would give his people was safety and security and peace-shalom from her enemies. Israel hoped for the day when God would give them peace-shalom and there would be no more war. In fact, there would be no sin, only worship of God without idolatry and evil and sin tainting the creation.

ESV Deuteronomy 25:19 Therefore when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your enemies around you, in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget.

ESV Joshua 1:13 "Remember the word that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, 'The LORD your God is providing you a place of rest and will give you this land.'¹⁴ Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land that Moses gave you beyond the Jordan, but all the men of valor among you shall pass over armed before your brothers and shall help them,¹⁵ until the LORD gives rest to your brothers as he has to you, and they also take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving them. Then you shall return to the land of your possession and shall possess it, the land that Moses the servant of the LORD gave you beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise."

ESV Joshua 22:4 And now the LORD your God has given rest to your brothers, as he promised them. Therefore turn and go to your tents in the land where your possession lies, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side of the Jordan.

Now in chapter 3 of *Judges* that rest or peace is again temporarily realized—but not fully—only for 40 years the first time, and the second time for only eighty years (we still have a few chapters to go!); this teaches us that there was still a greater rest that was to come.

Remember that the rest of God at creation on the seventh day was a pointer to an eschatological rest when God would sit down permanently upon His throne in the New Creation. Since the beginning of redemptive-history, God has pointed his believing people to a Shalom-Peace Rest found with Him by faith. The Israelites were to obey the fourth commandment weekly by remembering God's rest at creation and the rest they were given after their enslavement in Egypt (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5).

Joshua was to give the people rest in the Land of Canaan, and this rest was temporarily realized, but because Joshua was prevented from continuing in His office as Commander of the LORD, the rest soon ceased. There is a temporal rest under the judges, but mostly warfare and pain because of sin and idolatry.

Later, King David as Mediator of God gave the people rest in the Promised Land, ruling from Jerusalem, but that rest ended in a Divided Dynasty and Monarchy, and eventual exile for God's people to be once again enslaved and ruled over by foreign, heathen oppressors.

Permanent rest in the land was never realized in the Old Covenant...

Although the people entered into temporal rests throughout redemptive-history, there was still a permanent rest that was to come. In order for the rest or peace-shalom of God's people to be realized, in order for sin to be removed, the land had to be fully purified from idolatry; and for God to dwell permanently with His people the True Land of Promise must be entered and God's Messianic King must be enthroned there.

The Land of Canaan was a mere type of a place to come. The reason why rest was never realized was not only because of the people's sins and failure to fully worship and serve God, but it was mainly because the Land of Canaan pointed upward and forward to a greater more perfect place where God would dwell with man.

Although many in the Old Covenant walked by faith and the faithful remnant of believing Israel considered themselves exiles and strangers in this world, not one of them had entered the Glory Land of the New Jerusalem. True believers in the Old Covenant we are told did not make even the temporal Land of Canaan or Jerusalem their ultimate hope. True believing Israel was looking for rest in a land to come.

ESV Hebrews 11:13-16: These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

It was not Othniel's deliverance-salvation that could permanently bring peace to God's people; it was not Ehud's deliverance-salvation that could permanently bring rest and peace to God's people. Both of these Judge-Warrior-Savior-Deliverers died- -and when they died the problem of sin only continued- -Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals and Ashteroths.

What was needed then? **WHO** was needed? A Judge-Warrior-Savior-Deliverer who could take away sin, who could bring peace with God, who could ultimately destroy the enemy behind God's enemies, the devil; One who could be enthroned upon the throne in the New Jerusalem and bring ultimate rest and peace to the people.

This is what Jesus did! Jesus was so much greater than Othniel and Ehud as Judge-Warrior-Savior-Deliverer. Jesus' enemy and the evil one he came to defeat in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension victory was so much greater than the defeat of King Cushan-rishathaim and fat King Eglon (although both of these kings took their marching orders from him!).

Jesus was able to remove the iniquity and sins of God's people to redeem them permanently from death, hell and the devil (Heb. 2:14-18), and to give them His powerful Spirit so that they would not engage warfare against flesh and blood but against the principalities and powers and wicked forces in the evil realms through the virtue and power of Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension (6:10-18).

Christ has overcome death, hell and the devil, the three great powers that all mankind fears; the three great powers that enslave all mankind, Christ has overthrown and overcome and all those who believe in Christ are more than overcomers *in Him* (Romans 8:32-39). We now live not engaging in physical holy warfare as Christ's Church, but in a

spiritual warfare that is so much more powerful by God's Spirit because of the accomplished work of Christ our Great and Eternal Judge-Warrior-Savior-Deliverer.

Christ does not die like the other judges- -he continues in his office ruling over heaven and earth and Prophet, Priest and King! And when His people rebel, and they are stubborn, and they realize that they are being idolatrous, he forgives us when we confess our sins, and he commits himself to further delivering us from our sinful taint as he makes us more like Himself (Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:12-13).

But let us be reminded that many did not enter the rest of Christ in the Old Covenant because of failure to listen, obey, and heed the Word of God; in fact, many did not enter because of unbelief; this is still the case today, so let us be warned:

ESV Hebrews 3:12-19: Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. ¹⁵ As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." ¹⁶ For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? ¹⁷ And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹ So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

And Christ has indeed entered His rest permanently and eternally for us in His enthronement as King in the New Jerusalem and thus we too seek that rest that is in Christ, yet not fully realized by us ("already not yet"):

ESV Hebrews 4:1-11: Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. ² For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. ³ For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest,'" although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴ For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." ⁵ And again in this passage he said, "They shall not enter my rest." ⁶ Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷ again he appoints a certain day, "Today," saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." ⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God¹ would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰ for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

How do we escape the wrath of God that is so much greater than the justice of God realized in the sword that smote King Eglon and a foreshadow of God's wrath to come? How do we find the rest of God in the land, and the peace-shalom with God as forgiven sinners? Through Christ Jesus alone!

In Jesus Christ we enter into God's rest as we are united to Him by the Spirit, and we await the Day when he returns when we shall fully realize the rest and peace-shalom that God has obtained for all who believe in His Son, the LORD JESUS CHRIST, our Judge-Warrior-Savior-Deliverer in whom we put all of our trust.

But as God's people, we must live at Shalom-Peace in Christ realizing the war within (against indwelling sin) and the war without (world and temptations of the Evil One)- - knowing we're more than overcomers through Jesus who loved us! (Romans 8:31-39).

CRB

Bibliography for Further Reading

Block, Daniel. *Judges: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (The New American Commentary, NAC, B&H, 1999).

Davis, Dale Ralph. *Judges: Such a Great Salvation* (Focus on the Bible Series, Christian Focus Books, 2007).

Fausset, Andrew R. *Judges* (Geneva Series of Commentaries, Banner of Truth Trust, 1999).

Wilcock, Michael. *The Message of Judges* (The Bible Speaks Today, IVP, 1992).

Scripture Lesson

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 7:1-5:** "When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than yourselves, ² and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. ¹ You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. ³ You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, ⁴ for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the LORD would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. ⁵ But thus shall you deal with them: you shall break down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and chop down their Asherim and burn their carved images with fire.

Joshua 24:14-27: "Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. ¹⁵ And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." ¹⁶ Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods, ¹⁷ for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed. ¹⁸ And the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God." ¹⁹ But Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. ²⁰ If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good." ²¹ And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the LORD." ²² Then Joshua said to the people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the LORD, to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses." ²³ He said, "Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your heart to the LORD, the God of Israel." ²⁴ And the people said to Joshua, "The

LORD our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey." ²⁵ So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem. ²⁶ And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up there under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. ²⁷ And Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the LORD that he spoke to us. Therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God."

^{ESV} **Psalm 95:1** Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! ² Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! ³ For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. ⁴ In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. ⁵ The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. ⁶ Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! ⁷ For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, ⁹ when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. ¹⁰ For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways." ¹¹ Therefore I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest."

^{ESV} **Psalm 106:34-40:** They did not destroy the peoples, as the LORD commanded them, ³⁵ but they mixed with the nations and learned to do as they did. ³⁶ They served their idols, which became a snare to them. ³⁷ They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; ³⁸ they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood. ³⁹ Thus they became unclean by their acts, and played the whore in their deeds. ⁴⁰ Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against his people, and he abhorred his heritage...