

JUDGE OTHNIEL, EHUD AND SHAMGAR

Judges 3:7-31 (Key Verse 10)

"The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, so that he became Israel's judge and went to war. The LORD gave Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him."

From last week's message we were given an introduction of the life cycle of the Israelites in the promised land. We learnt how they will sin against God, disobey his commands, serve other gods. We learnt how after a while the Israelites would cry out to the Lord, and how God would raise for them a judge who would rescue them and grant them peace in the land. We learnt that the Israelites will continue with this cycle, and how God will continue to raise for them a judge each time, when they cried out to Him after their failure. Now from today's passage we are going to learn in detail how God raised the judges, the type of Judges that the Lord raised, and how all the judges God raised could be so victorious. May God help us to receive one word today, so that we can learn how we can truly be victorious.

The passage today begins with rather very sad words, in **verse 7** it says: "The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord; they forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs." And this angered the Lord greatly, that He sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram Naharaim, whom they were subject to for 8 years. The Israelites were God's chosen people, God rescued them from the land of slavery in Egypt into the promised land so that they could be His people and He their one and only God. However, in this time the Israelites lost their identity and disobeyed God by serving other gods, they forgot God who rescued them, who has been with them, the God who truly loves them. The Israelites were deceived by the worldly living of the people in the land, and they forgot about God. Today as well many people are consumed by the flashy things of this world, people are consumed by what their jobs can do for them, they are consumed by what their education can do for them, they are consumed by what their sport or arts career can do for them to such a point where they even do not acknowledge God.

When God saw all this, He was filled great anger. Why was God angered by this? This is because of sin, God hates sin. When the Israelites forgot about God, they opened their lives into sin, they did evil before the eyes of the Lord. So God gave them over into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim and were subjected to great suffering until they cried out to God in the eighth year. The Israelites cried out to God because they remembered the greatness and joy of living under the care and protection of God, they remembered God's compassion and love for them, so they cried out. What did God do when the Israelites cried out to him? Let us look at **verse 9**: "But when they cried out to the Lord, he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, who saved them." God did not reject the Israelites when they cried out to Him, He did not ignore them, or left them in their misery and suffering, but rather he immediately raised for them a judge who through him he could save them. The Judge's name was Othniel Son of Kenaz, this was the very same Othniel who responded to Caleb's decision of faith to give his daughter to the man who could capture Kiriah Sepher in Chapter 1. Othniel was indeed a great man of faith who honoured Caleb's decision of faith.

And today God raised him as a judge to rescue the people of Israel, Othniel was amongst the Israelites when they suffered for eight years under the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim but he could not save the Israelites, his track record and strength was not sufficient to save the Israelites. It is only when God raised him that he could save the Israelites. How is this possible that he could only save the Israelites only when God raised him? What is special about being raised by God? Let us look at **verse 10**: "The Spirit of the Lord came on him, so that he became Israel's judge and went to war. The Lord gave Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him." When God raised Othniel, it was special because it was not just an appointment based on abilities, strengths and power of Othniel. It was by the spirit of God that Othniel could be raised as a judge who could rescue the people of Israel. So to be raised and used by God does not depend on how we look, our strength and abilities, but rather it depends on the spirit of God. When the Israelites were under the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim, Othniel could not stand for the people of Israel to fight for them as a judge, it is only when the spirit of God came upon him that he could stand and take position as a judge, ready to fight for his people Israel.

Furthermore, Israel's victory did not depend on the strength and ability of Othniel, it did not depend on the numbers of the Israel people, but rather it too was in the hands of God. In the key verse it says: "The Lord gave Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him." Here God revealed to the Israelites that only he can fight for them and lead them to victory, he revealed to them that their battle is not theirs but is God's battle and only he knows best how to overcome. This is the same as having peace and joy, the Israelites thought the only way to have joy and peace is following the way of the world, worshipping other gods, but through their failure we can see that both our victory, peace and joy are in the hands of the Lord. Today as well many people think in order to have peace and joy they need to get a great education, they need to have a good job, they need to live in other parts of the world like America, but this is not true. Joy comes from the Lord regardless where we are and what we do. Furthermore, many people think in order to have salvation they need to live in a particular way, they need overcome certain bad habits, this is very good to desire to be pure. But by our own strength we cannot do it, all this will do to us, is leave us miserable with a sense of failure. The only way we can be made pure and be saved is through God himself, our salvation is only through the mercy and grace of God. The only way we can be changed is through the spirit of God, not by might or power, but by the spirit of God.

When we have the spirit of God, we can have faith that indeed Jesus died on the cross for our sins, we can have faith that indeed death has no power over us. When we have the spirit of God we can have a sense of victory, such that we can be able to stand up and go out into the world and preach the gospel that saved us without fear. But when we do not have the spirit of God, we will be overcome by fear of the very opinionated students, we will be overcome by fear of people who will accuse us of hypocrisy because of our past. So to be victorious and to have joy and peace, we do not need to have a particular ability, strength or power in this world, all we need is the spirit of God, all we need is to depend on God. So our prayer should be for the spirit of God to come upon us. When the spirit of God came upon Othniel, peace prevailed in the land of Israel for 40 years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died.

When Judge Othniel died, Israel went back to where they started, they did evil against Lord, the very reason they lived under the misery of worldly kings. Why would they go back to their old ways after God rescued them when they cried out? They went back because their cry to God was not a cry of repentance, but just a shallow cry needing to be saved from danger. But because God so loved them and has compassion on them, he saved them anyway by raising Judge Othniel. But now when Judge Othniel who was filled with the spirit of God died, they too died and went back to their old ways. What happened when the Israelites did evil against God again? When the Israelites did evil again against the Lord, they were handed over to Eglon king of Moab who gathered the Ammonites and Amalekites and attacked Israel and took possession of the city of palms. The Israelites were subjected to Eglon, and this time the Israelites were much more stubborn to the very fact that God can rescue them, they waited for 18 years before they could cry out to God. And when they did, God immediately answered to their cry by raising for them a deliverer.

Who did God raise for them? God raised a left-handed man Ehud, the son of Gera the Benjamite. At the time, the right hand was considered as the hand of strength, now being left handed was somewhat considered as a limitation, or even a disability to some degree. Even today many parents teach their children to use the right hand, when we greet one another we use the right hand. But in the midst of this stigma, God raised Ehud as a judge for the Israelites. And when God raised him, when the spirit of God came upon him something amazing happened. Ehud was filled with so much passion, with great precision he made a double-edged sword about a cubit long which he strapped on his right thigh. Ehud strategically presented a tribute to Eglon the king of Moab who was a fat man, this included things like grain and livestock. At the time presentation of a tribute to a king was an indication of honour and acknowledgement of a king. But this was not the case for Ehud, it was a way of opening a door to take down Eglon. So after Ehud had presented the tribute, he sent those who had carried the tribute. But he, moved by the spirit of God returned to Eglon when he reached the stone images near Gilgal and he said to Eglon: "Your Majesty, I have a secret message for you." Eglon ordered all his attendants to leave the room, leaving him and Ehud in the room. Once again, here we see the work of God that the king could be left alone with Ehud. And immediately the very spirit filled, passionate Ehud went to the king Eglon and said: "I have a message from God for you."

The king's eyes popped, and just as he was about to stand, Ehud reached out for his sword with his left hand on his right thigh and plunged it into the king's belly such that the handle of the blade sank and his bowels discharged. Ehud left the sword and the fat closed in over it. When Ehud finished, he calmly left the king's room and locked the doors.

Ehud together with the other Israelites suffered in the hand of the king of Moab Eglon for 18 years, how come he could not take down the king in this way? He probably thought about all his limitation, that he is left handed, that the king is powerful and many other reasons. But when the spirit of God intervened, Ehud could be victorious, Ehud could be filled with passion, precision, calmness and a sense of victory. Because of God, Ehud's attitude could completely change, God was Ehud's strength and refuge, God was Ehud's everything. When Ehud looked at God over his own strength, he realised that nothing is impossible. He could even order the Israelites with passion, planting conviction in their hearts saying: "Follow me, for the Lord has given Moab, your enemy, into your hands." And when the Israelites heard this, they could take down about ten thousand Moabites, all vigorous and strong; not one escaped. From that day on Moab was made subject to Israel, and the land had peace for eighty years.

After Ehud, God raised another Judge for the Israelites when they cried out to him, just like Othniel and Ehud, he too filled by the spirit of God miraculously struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad and saved the people of Israel. How could he be victorious with just an oxgoad against such large numbers? It is because God was with him, God fought for him. It is also amazing how he too went on to fight when the situation seemed impossible. Indeed the spirit of God worked mightily in the heart of Shamgar.

When I think about how God could raised and used this Judges, I cannot help but be encouraged and rebuked at the same time. For a very long time I have struggled with confidence, this was visible at work and even in ministry, I found it very hard to challenge things, I found it very hard to stand and speak confidently, I was always afraid and worried about making a mistake, I was afraid of people. With my condition I could not influence others, I was just an ordinary person who could not make an impact in this world. One day I was in Uganda, this lady told me that I must not down play my capabilities, it hit me hard. But still I could rise and overcome my weakness of confidence, I still felt lacking deep down. But from today's passage I have learnt that influencing the world does not depend upon me and my capabilities, but it is all in the hands of God. I have learnt that even though I might seem weak and meek, God can use me. In fact I have realised that even though it might look like I am weak, God still could use me. I believe it was only because of the spirit of God that I could be raised a servant in this ministry, when I look at myself in the mirror I still can't believe that I serve message on Sunday, I cant believe that God could use me to lead the graduates group Bible study. Through me God could do amazing things, I pray that I may repent and look upon God, continuously pray to depend on his spirit over my limited capabilities. May God be with us all to always remember that our battles in this world are not ours, they are in the hands of God. I pray that we may depend on God for strength and wisdom. I pray that we may depend on our Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation and not our abilities. May we have faith that we too can be raised as Judges even with our limitation, to lead the people of our generation to salvation.