

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Judges 3 as we continue our verse-by-verse journey through the Scriptures.

God used Moses to lead the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt after 430 years. He brought them to the borders, really, of the Promised Land, gave them their national, if you will, identity. When Joshua came to power, He brought them into the land, He gave them a place that they could call their own. They settled the land. The tribes were given the land by the LORD. They were to overthrow the enemies that were living in it because God had judged that they had had enough time to repent, and Israel would be the arm of God's judgment against them. Before Joshua retired, thirty-one kings that were the most powerful in the land were overthrown, and God gave to the children of Israel (the individual tribes) the job of mopping up.

The time of Judges follows chronologically from the book of Joshua. It stretches from the time of Joshua's death until the reign of King Saul. So, from 1380 or so B.C. to 1040 or so B.C. - about 340 years or so. The judges - all of them that are on that little list of paper (handed out to us before the study started) - ruled for about 410 years; and the reason you have more is there were a couple of judges that were ruling at the same time. But they cover roughly 340 years. In all, there were fifteen judges, as that paper should tell you. The last two are found in 1 Samuel. We only know that they're judges because God calls them that, although they were a little bit out of the time period, if you will. For some of the judges, time passes very quickly. In fact, we'll run into a guy at the end of chapter 3 who's mentioned in one verse. Other folks like Gideon or Deborah get chapters and even more.

The lesson of the book of Judges is fairly simple. There is a way that you can fall into sin when God is blessing you, and because God loves you, He's not going to leave you there. And so seven different examples God sets before us out of these fifteen judges. He uses seven of them to set before us what we called last week the sin-drome. They are at rest. Things are good. Because when all things are good in your life, you're not so necessarily pressed towards the Lord. And so you have this tendency, then, to rebel; and they did. With rebellion, because God loves

you, there's retribution. He'll do whatever it takes to get you back on track because that's His concern for you and for me. When that pressure is severe, there is usually a place where you go, "All right. This isn't worth it. I repent." And when you repent, the Lord honors it. In this case, He sends judges that deliver the whole nation from oppression. With the victory of the judges and their example, rest sets in. Everything's good. And then, unfortunately, you start the whole cycle all over again. And we'll see some of that tonight - the five Rs, if you will - rest, rebellion, retribution, repentance, restoration, rest, and there you go.

All of the causes of the problems for the children of Israel in the book of Judges are highlighted in the book. But they can all be, almost all of them, traced back to leaving these enemies in the land where they were supposed to wipe them out. I think it speaks volumes to us as God's people that we shouldn't allow the enemy any room in our lives to operate. The more stuff you let in your life, the more stuff that you entertain or protect or allow yourself to be around, the harder walking with God is. The better off you are if all of that stuff is just away from your life, where you're just in a position where God is something you're interested in, and the enemy doesn't have, really, a place.

Tonight we begin the particulars of how this all worked out. In fact, if you were here with us in chapters 1 and 2 last week, that sin-drome was established. There was a generation after Joshua - didn't know the LORD, didn't know His power, and the people had no leadership. There was no successor to Joshua in terms of an individual; not like Moses, not like Joshua. Now the people had to learn to walk by themselves, and when they stopped doing that - both individually and collectively - then God raises up someone for a time. But it's kind of created by the LORD to move you forward in your own kind of walk with Him, to mature. And it doesn't work very well for most of the folks that we read about. Whereas the book of Deuteronomy covered seventy days (and would have only been forty had they not included the thirty days of mourning for the death of Moses), and Joshua covered twenty-five years or so, tonight, in two chapters, we're going to go over 120 years of history. So put on your caps, I guess.

Verse 1 says this, "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 (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), 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. 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. Thus the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites," (the termites) (Laughing) "and the Jebusites. And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons; and they served their gods." So this next generation that follows Joshua's rulership was in a land riddled (still) with the enemy that God had said, "Deal with," but unfortunately they did not. And so because they did not, the path for their walk with God became very difficult. They were hard on themselves. It really is something that you do to yourself. And so rather than looking to the LORD who had a way of victory for them, they were slow learners. It was kind of like when you fight with your flesh. You know that your flesh is not going to lead you to life, but so often we give into it anyway rather than fight against it. And so notice that even the LORD allowed those things to be there to be a test to them.

You might remember way back in Deuteronomy 7 when the LORD gathered the children of Israel together and spoke through Moses, and He said to the people, "Look, when I bring you into the land, I'm going to cast out the nations before you," and He mentions these seven "ites." Now there are more than seven "ites," but the Canaanites were comprised of largely these seven larger tribes, if you will, and the LORD said, "They are seven nations that are mightier than you. God will deliver them over to you. You can conquer them. You can destroy them. What you can't do is make any covenant with them, show them any mercy, give them your children to be married to. Don't take their sons and daughters to be your kids' wives and husbands, and don't serve their gods. Because if you do, the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you, and He'll be angry with you, and He'll deal with you in that manner." And so the LORD had warned them years ago, even as they were going to go in, that this was something they had to be careful of.

But here comes a generation who chooses to ignore the wisdom of God, the counsel of God, and they decide to do exactly what God said not to do. I'm always amazed, not only in the lives of the people I talk to (sometimes in my own life as well), that I can read the Bible, know exactly what it says, and somehow, even though it's very specific and clear, be able to say to myself with eyes wide open, "Well, that doesn't apply to me. It doesn't seem to apply to me." And we find that amongst these folks a lot. You see happening (with their own eyes) the things that God had warned them of, and God leaves them in that land (notice in the first few verses

here) to test their obedience. Here's a new generation. Would they respond well or not? And they dwell among the "ites," and verse 5 says pretty soon they are intimate with the "ites." And God warns them. Why does God warn you? Because He loves you. I used to remember - maybe you do as well - when I was a kid, maybe junior high or something, I thought everything my parents told me was not for my good. Every idea they had was stupid - coming in early, going to bed early, eating the Brussels sprouts. Oh, my. How can those be good for me? I hate 'em going in, they've got to be terrible just when they're in. And my dad, "Oh, these are good for you." Lies. "Sleep is good for you." Lies. Now I believe him with all of my heart. (Laughing) I would obey him early on if he liked. But there's this loss of understanding that God, because He loves us, would like to keep us from suffering. But yet you make your own choices. "There's a way that seems right to a man, but the end is death" (Proverbs 14:12). But it seems right to us, and it certainly seemed right to the nation that had such a wonderful history with God.

So, here's the stage that is set for the second generation who, in the land now, refuses God's Word, and the book of Judges chronicles the reaping of the whirlwind - the tragedies, the suffering, the bondage, the captivity, the difficulties. And you also get to meet God's grace and mercy and see the effect of really godly leaders. So, verses 1 through 6 tell us the situation with this new generation.

Verse 7 says, "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. Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia;" (I'll just call him CJ) "and the children of Israel served CJ eight years." First issue, first judge, first sin-drome. "The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD," and the explanation is "they forgot." They forgot. They forgot what the LORD had said. "They forgot the LORD their God." Back in chapter 8 of Deuteronomy, when Moses sat the people down, he said, "When you come into the land, and you eat, and you're full, and you're blessed and God's given you a good land, be careful that you don't forget the LORD." There's something about waiting upon God when you're in trouble that the minute He delivers to you, you say, "Thank you," but then you go your way, and you just forget what God has done. He said in chapter 8, to the people in warning, "Remember the LORD. And if you forget the LORD, to serve these other gods, and serve them, you're going to perish." That's what the LORD said back in Deuteronomy 8. "Here's the rule book. Here's the way things go." So the children

of Israel don't have Joshua to follow, they're on their own, so to speak, but now they are back in the land, and they are forgetting what God has said. The LORD will say that in the postcard that He sends to the Ephesian church in Revelation 2:4. He'll say to the Ephesians, "You've left your first love. You forgot why you're here. You forgot what drove you. You forgot what motivated you. You've just forgotten." And I think sometimes we can come to church routinely - we sit in the same place, we sing the same songs, we meet the same people, we park in the same parking spot. And we forget.....all that God has done. What they did was they left the LORD to serve Baal and Ashtaroth, which means that they worshipped tree trunks; and they worshipped carved images, and they worshipped wooden poles, and they got on their faces, and they saw power in these things. They break the first two commandments immediately. Right? You shall not have any gods before Me. You should have no graven images. And they joined the Canaanites. Canaanites were pantheists, which means that, in nature, everything was a god. They truly believed that the sun had a god, and the moon had a god, and the stars and fire did, and the rivers did, and the trees did; and everything in nature had a god. And so you had - as farmers and people that had to live off the land - your great obligation was to placate these gods. Make sure we get rain when we needed it and sunshine when we needed it, that the crops would grow. And so the chief fertility gods for the Canaanites were Baal and the female counterpart, Ashtaroth, to bless the crops, to bless the fields, to bless their families. And not only were they pantheists in that regard, they viewed all of the earth, in that sense, as a god. They couldn't separate creation from the Creator, and so they talked about Mother Earth, Mother Nature. I think we still hear about that kind of stuff. But it is rooted in Canaanite outlook.

So the Jews, living among people who didn't know God, forgot their God. And the Canaanites believed that the gods ruled in territories. In fact, if you were a Canaanite who lived in the mountains, and you had to fight some people down in the valley, it was your god against their god. It was the mountain god versus the valley god. May the best god win. And whose god would win? And so, in the midst of that, stands the Jews - monotheistic. They only believed in one God. There was no one on the planet that believed like that, except for them. They knew one God - the Creator of all. They had come to know Him. And yet they lived in the midst of people that they find themselves in kind of a great difficulty because it's hard to worship someone who's invisible. Right? You haven't seen God, and yet you're here to worship God. And so they struggled, and the people looked around, and all they saw in their neighborhoods and in the mountains and down at the beach were idols.

And they served a God that alone said to them, "Now, don't make any of those about Me. You just worship Me in spirit and in truth. You come and you look to Me." And the people had a hard time. They didn't have an image, and so they couldn't capture Him in an image, and they were told not to. The Bible would say that there's no sense making an image of God because the minute you do, you reduce the God that you serve. You can't make an image that is going to completely capture who He is. You remember when Aaron was left with the people, and Moses was up in the mountains, they sought to have Aaron make an image of God that they could relate to. "Let us have something we can see and that we can worship." I read once the making of images takes imagination, but the knowledge of God comes through revelation. God comes to show Himself to you through His Word and by His Spirit. And no image can capture or communicate the Person of God, which is why the psalmist writes in Psalm 115:4-5, "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; eyes they have, but they do not see." Ultimately, your image, your idol is worse off or weaker than you. You make a god less than yourself. He becomes the guy that you can't control. In fact, we're going to learn in a few weeks that Gideon's father, who worshipped Baal, realized when his friends said, "We should defend Baal," that he went, "Wait a minute. If he's that strong, let him defend himself." "We can't because he's a tree trunk. Here he is. Throw him in the fire, he's pretty much disappearing."

So the children of Israel, after Joshua's death, threw in with the idolaters; left behind the only God that was true and real, and left Him behind. And so God, because of their rest and now their rebellion, in verse 8, "Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of CJ." By the way, his name means a man of Cush who is doubly guilty. That's what that word means - Rishathaim - double guilt. So I doubt if he took that nickname for himself. I'm sure that he was called that by the people that he oversaw. He was an extremely wicked guy. The LORD, in His anger at His people, allowed this guy to take over. Right? "He sold them into the hand." His anger was hot against His people. And He did it for their own benefit. Now, what amazes me is reading it took the nation eight years of suffering to go, "Maybe we should pray. What we really need to do now is go find the LORD because this isn't good." But it took them eight years to come to their senses; a nation whose history was filled with miraculous deliverances from wicked men. And so there's that "R" again - retribution leads to repentance. And as they cry out, God sends them a deliverer - one who would secure victory but also spiritual restoration before this new round begins.

And so we read, in verse 9, "When the children of Israel cried out to the LORD," (repentance), "the LORD raised up a deliverer for the children of Israel, who delivered them: Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD delivered CJ king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed over him. So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died." Now, Othniel was a pretty good choice for a couple of reasons. He was proven. If you were with us in chapter 1 last week, he fought alongside his nephew, Caleb, against the stronghold at a place called Debir. He was fearless in his battle. He was a guy that didn't run when things got tough. He believed God. In fact, he had a great role model to follow - just imagine him following around with Caleb all of his life, a man who stands apart in the Bible as someone who wholly followed the LORD, who hung out and was one of the two chosen by the LORD to get into the Land of Promise from a whole generation who died. So he had a great godly man to emulate. He'd been proven on the battlefield. And if that wasn't enough, verse 10 says, "The Spirit of the LORD came upon him," a necessary ingredient. Right? If you really want to make a difference in the world, God has to anoint your life, doesn't He? You have to be set apart. In fact, the first two qualifications of being proven and having a good role model are not enough. Those are temporary benefits if he doesn't have God's anointing upon him. And so the LORD used him. He delivered the nation from this double-guilty guy, CJ; took him out, restored the people. They had rest for forty years, the fruit of just turning to the LORD. Look how long the rest lasted.

But then we get to verse 12, and it says, "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. Then he gathered to himself the people of Ammon and Amalek, went and defeated Israel, and took possession of the City of Palms. So the children of Israel served Eglon king of Moab eighteen years." So the cycle begins again in verse 12 - the madness of sin. You should write over the book of Judges - how long will it take till we learn? Right? This is a book of stupid moves. And I hope by the time we get to the end of the book, you will hate sin or at least hate the cycle of sin and how stupid this is. Seven examples. The number seven, by the way, in the Bible - when it's used - (from a spiritual standpoint) always speaks about completeness. And these guys completely failed - in every aspect, every time turning to the LORD. So they were in bondage for eight years, God dealt with them, delivered them, and they went, "Oh, that's great," and for forty years they served the LORD. Another generation

comes and goes, and the next generation doesn't act upon what the last generation had taught them. I love how the LORD is always there when the people are wanting to follow the LORD. I hope you'll learn from Judges that we, as God's people, as sheep, need good shepherds because if we don't have them, the church tends to go astray. That's why leadership is born. You need folks that can say to us, "Go this way." You need devoted leaders who won't turn their backs on.....because every time the judge dies, the people go astray. Every time. So it is important to have good influence, I think, around you.

Well verse 12 tells us that the children of Israel turned again, that the LORD raised up this King Eglon from Moab. Moab, if you remember their maps, is east of the Dead Sea. It is still in Jordan today. Their rebellion followed that time of rest, and the retribution was quick to follow. The LORD strengthened the hand of Eglon, this wicked king of Moab, against Israel. Now there are sometimes people, when you read these kinds of things to them, who are upset because God would strengthen some pagan king against His own people. And they say, "Well that's not right," or, "That's not fair. Those people are worse than His people are." But I would just say to you - if you don't like it, just get used to it because the LORD does it a lot, and He does it for our own good. When the Assyrians came in to deal with the northern kingdom of Israel to take them into captivity, the LORD said to the Assyrian king, "He is the rod of My anger" (Isaiah 10:5). When Cyrus was raised up, the Medo-Persian king, the LORD called him, "My anointed" (Isaiah 45:1). He wasn't anything godly, mind you, but he was in God's hand to accomplish God's purposes. When Nebuchadnezzar stepped up as the Babylonian leader and took out the southern kingdom, the LORD said, "He's My servant" (Jeremiah 27:6, 43:10). Not exactly stuff you'd call wicked rulers, but Nebuchadnezzar took the children of Israel into captivity for seventy years - for their own good. So the principle is always the same. "Even the wrath of man will praise Him" - that's what the Bible says (Psalm 76:10). Or that, "The heart of the king is in the hand of the LORD, and He'll turn it wherever He wants" (Proverbs 21:1). So this time the LORD raises up this guy Eglon. He used him to chastise His people so they would stop being in rebellion. Now He chose this group - along with Ammon and Amalek - around the City of Palms (verse 13), around where Jericho had been, and these tribes took Israel's possessions and dominated them for, this time, eighteen years. Now the first time it was eight years before they wised up. This generation takes half a generation before these hard-hearted folks say, "We should go back to the LORD."

And notice the word "but" in verse 15. They dominated them for eighteen years, "but," and there was always one of those in these stories. "But the children of Israel cried out to the LORD," again, repentance that would lead to restoration. Aren't you glad God is patient with our repentance? "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." And so they turn back to the LORD, and God raises up this second judge, Ehud by name, from the tribe of Benjamin. And the LORD wants you to know he was a southpaw. He's a left-handed guy. In ancient times, being left-handed was seen as a defect or as a disadvantage. So we read of the right hand of power and the Lord sitting at the right hand (Matthew 26:64, Mark 14:61-62, Hebrews 1:3). That was always the right place to be, if you will. But if you were a lefty, that wasn't viewed as such a blessing, at least in the culture. It does seem that the Benjamites, a lot of them, were left-handed, that it could be a genetic issue. Because if you read in the Scriptures in Judges 20 (and we'll get there in a few weeks), they were a warrior bunch, and yet you read there, and it says, "And from their cities (from Benjamin) numbered twenty-six thousand men who drew the sword," and "seven hundred select men - of these seven hundred, all were left-handed," it says, "and every one could sling a stone at a hair's breadth and not miss." So they were pretty good at the firing range. So these guys were warriors, and they had a disadvantage which God used, if you will, as an advantage for their serving the LORD.

So whereas Othniel was a great choice, the first judge - he had background and example, and he had faithfulness, and he'd been proven, and God's Spirit was upon him - the second guy that God used to deliver His people was kind of a guy that had a disadvantage, that he was kind of seen in a deficit way, and yet God would glorify Himself and bless His people and make the disadvantage in this man's life an advantage or a tool in God's hand. If you are a person that is often put off or easily defeated by the small things in life, know this - that God uses the disadvantaged to accomplish His will. For Ehud, as we'll read in a minute, most right-handers, when they carried their daggers, would carry them on their left thigh. They would be able to reach across and then use it in battle. But he had it on his right side, and no one was looking that way. So he just looked like, "Well, watch his left pocket." But he was going the other way because nobody was used to seeing left-handed guys. And God would use this quirk, if you will, this disadvantage, to deliver Israel from this very mean-spirited guy from Moab named Eglon.

So we read, notice, in verse 15 at the end, that Ehud was sent every time he had to go pay taxes to Eglon. He'd be the guy that would go deliver the taxes, the oppressive taxes. "Now," we read in verse 16, "Ehud made himself a dagger (it was double-edged and a cubit in length)" - 18 inches long - "and fastened it under his clothes on his right thigh" (opposite to where everyone would wear it). "So he brought the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. (Now Eglon was a very fat man)." I know the Bible is not politically correct. (Laughing) But let's face it, this was a fat guy. Verse 18, "And when he had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who had carried the tribute. 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. So 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." Now the Bible is very direct. Like I said, this isn't a full-figured guy, this is a fat guy. And if you read, at least history would bear that out, that all of these kings of these foreign powers, these ancient kings, they loved being brought words from the gods. "Hey, the gods have a word for you." "Oh, that's right, I'm a king." And they would warm up to that almost immediately. And I think Ehud knew that, and he might have used it to get close to him.

And so we have this story which guys love and girls think is gross. But it gets worse in chapter 4 - I'll just warn you. Verse 21, "Then Ehud reached with his left hand," (as the king stood up to have a word from the gods), "took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. Even the hilt went in after the blade," (that's 18 inches) "and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the dagger out of his belly; and his entrails came out." See, guys love this stuff! Yeah! That's it for him. "Then Ehud went out through the porch and shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them" and just kind of disappeared while everybody else was outside. Verse 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.' 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." Well, in the meantime, verse 25, "Ehud had escaped while they delayed, and passed beyond the stone images and escaped to Seirah." So, twice God mentions the idol worship of this king and of this people. Verse 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. 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. And at that time they killed about ten thousand men of Moab, all stout men of valor; not a man escaped. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest" - look at this - "for eighty years," two generations. This left quite an impression. Now, the Moabites sought to flee home - south. They blocked the Jordan. They took guys off one at a time, and the defeat was solid. So here's the second judge. And, by the way, in these judges and through these things, notice that God is wiping out the people that they should have been wiping out to begin with. But in any event, the LORD uses a guy with defects.

I remember reading Hudson Taylor's story years ago (who was the founder of Inland China Missions), and he was a guy that did more to get the gospel to China than probably anyone else. But he didn't see much of the fruit himself. It kind of came after him. Needless to say, there was an interview that was done with him before he died, and somebody asked him why he thought God had used him to lead and to develop this organization. And his immediate answer was, "I'm the weakest man I know." And he went on to say that God was attracted to weakness, and that's why God used him. "I'm the weakest man I know." Now that doesn't work very well with American theology because we think the stronger we are, the better that is. But that's not true biblically. We're stronger when God's in charge. God doesn't help those who help themselves. God blesses the weak, He chooses the weak.

And so here's a guy with an apparent problem that society would say he doesn't measure up, he doesn't fit in, he's kind of defective, he's at a disadvantage. And yet God uses him. And, again, here's that rest (verse 30), but this time the longest rest that you'll find in the book of Judges - two generations, about eighty years.

And we read, in verse 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." And notice verse 1 of chapter 4, "When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD." So we have this inset (verse 30 goes right to verse 1) of this guy named Shamgar. Only one verse named of him. And his name is not Hebrew; his name is pagan in origin. In fact, his father's name, Anath, is the pagan goddess for sex and war. So the assumption about this fellow, Shamgar, was someone who was raised in a very pagan household who then converted to the God

of Israel. Now we are told that when he was around, he had a weapon of choice that was nothing more than an ox goad, an 8-foot or so pole with a sharp end on one side to coax the oxen to move forward in plowing and then a flat section on the other end to clean the dirt out of the plow. So it was a mechanical tool, if you will, it was a simple instrument, and it may have been his advantage because, as a lowly farmer who used his oxen to plow his fields, probably not someone they would suspect being a good fighter. And yet, in his life (and I don't think this means one battle), he killed six hundred Philistines, delivering God's own. So, if you look at verse 1 of chapter 4, and you realize that the story continues, there are some folks in Bible commentary that would say this guy wasn't a judge because he's just kind of inset as a one-verse kind of off guy, and we really can't put him in the story. Well, I put him on your notes only because he's right here. I really don't care if he's voted in as a real judge or not. He was a deliverer that God used.

But, interestingly enough, the first three people are very diverse. Othniel was well-qualified, experienced, a godly example, filled with the Spirit. The second guy had a handicap deficit that he used into an asset. And this guy, Shamgar, was a pagan; upbringing that was idolatrous, who was converted, and who used the tools of a lowly farmer to serve the LORD. So pretty much God can use anybody to bless His people. You don't have to rise up to some kind of level. He doesn't just use the PhD guy or the well-advantaged or the well-to-do. He's good at using anybody that's available in His hand. So I put him in your notes. He's mentioned, like I said, just in one verse. But I wouldn't mind just having my name in one verse in the Bible. How 'bout you? I mean, that's honorable mention that I would appreciate! And God put him there for a reason.

Chapter 4, Deborah. There's only one of the fifteen judges in the Bible that's a woman. She's an outstanding leader. She's, in fact, the only woman in the Bible that God chose to be the national leader of the country. God often uses the faith of women to move His people forward. I think that sometimes we talk about men like somehow they're special or more special. But I find that God would often use women to accomplish His purposes. You know, we talk about Moses bringing the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt, but Hebrews first gives this credit to his mom and dad. In fact, in Hebrews 11:23 it says, "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command." They did as long as they could with him to give him all that he needed, and then she had to let him go on the river - upstream from where the Pharaoh lived. Salvation for Israel (out of Egypt)

began with his mother and father; and certainly with mom, who is mentioned there in particular. If you go to the genealogy of David, you find a woman of great faith named Ruth. You find a woman that delivered Israel from the Persian Empire by the name of Esther, and had she not spoken up, I think that we would have lost the people of God all together. The LORD used her. The salvation of the world began with Mary, a faithful handmaiden fourteen or fifteen years old, who was ready to just be used by the LORD. So you find a lot of Deborah types in the Bible. Right?

But, again, like every time there's someone who dies (of a leadership capacity, like a judge), the people have difficulty. There's a proclivity for evil. And you find that these judges, the fifteen of them on that paper that we gave you, are more than just kind of physical deliverers. But they are, in many ways, kind of moral and spiritual guides for the people, and they direct the people's relationship with the LORD, they invite them to trust the LORD, they set an example that you should walk with God. And they're great reminders, I think, to me of the necessity of surrounding yourself with people you can trust and look up to. Every time a judge dies and the people lapse back into idolatry, and then God has to chastise them again, I think there's a great highlight in this book between reformation and revival. Right? Reformation is outward, and usually reformation is temporary; whereas revival is a change of heart that's long-lasting, it's permanent. So there's a lot of reforming that goes on. But revival is not a religion, it's a genuine repentance that causes your life to change and bear fruit. And so Israel, in these instances (especially in Judges), almost reminds me of that man in Jesus' parable who had a demon (Matthew 12). And you remember the Lord came by and delivered him, and it says that his house was swept clean as this demon was driven out. But because that life was then not occupied with God's Spirit, then you read there were seven more demons that came with the original guy who left and that their last condition was far worse than the first. And you seem to read that here. Every time the nation falls, it just seems to get worse for them.

So, a lot of it was reformation but not revival. There wasn't a true repentance, and so even when it lasted eighty years (and that's pretty good), eventually you read what you read in verse 1 of chapter 4 which says, "When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth Hagoyim." So the children of Israel are again overthrown in Hazor. Now Hazor, if you remember, Joshua when he was alive (in chapter 11) destroyed Hazor - he leveled it, he burned it to the ground. In

fact, if you go with us to Israel, there is a Hazor that we visit. It's about four miles or so north of Capernaum, right on the Sea of Galilee. And the archeologists, in uncovering the artifacts, have found a whole layer of a city that still showed that it had been burned with fire - which is exactly what the Bible teaches us. But by now it had already been resettled, and notice, in verse 1, that the righteousness only lasted until the judge died.

So verse 3 tells us, "And the children of Israel cried out to the LORD; for Jabin had nine hundred chariots of iron, and for twenty years he had harshly oppressed the children of Israel." Eight years, eighteen years, twenty years. They don't go well. So for twenty years, the children of Israel were oppressed by a guy that was armed to the teeth. I mean, having an iron chariot would kind of be like having a tank and you're fighting infantrymen, and he had nine hundred of them. So Israel cries out (in verse 3), but it doesn't seem that they cry out, out of revival kind of repentance. They cry out, out of comfort. They don't want to be cleansed; they just want to be out from under this. It's almost like they look at the LORD as one giant aspirin, like, "I've just got to take the LORD when things hurt. Give me two of those, and call me in the morning." And that's the relationship that they have with God. It's so unlike David who, in his sin with Bathsheba, cries out to the LORD, "Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out my transgressions. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:9-10). I mean, he wanted to be changed. These guys just want out from under the gun. And so they cry out. They're long on crying out, short on repentance. They're long on inconvenience. I remember hearing a story a few years ago about a fellow who took advantage of this amnesty that the IRS was offering in terms of if you paid some taxes or something that you should have paid. And this fellow sent a check for \$15,000 to the IRS on this day that you could freely deal with them. And he said, "Look, I couldn't sleep for weeks. My guilt was just overwhelming, and so I'm sending you this check for \$15,000." The next line said, "If I still can't sleep, I'll send you the rest." (Laughing) And I thought that's exactly what you find in repentance so often. It's like, "Whatever I have to do to feel good, whatever little I have to do, whatever steps I need to take. I'm not hungry to be changed by God. I just want as much as I can get with giving as little back as I have to." And you find that a lot here - remorse because of suffering, but when deliverance comes, you go back to it. And real repentance changes your life once and for all. I always make the example for myself of losing weight. I'm forever on a diet. I start every Monday, every Monday. People say, "Are you on a diet?" I go, "Monday." And I'll be honest with you - I can do it if I put my mind to it. But most of the time, I just

don't want to. Now I lie to myself and say, "I'm going to start Monday." So I feel pretty good about myself. My intentions are pure and holy and upright and (Laughing) expanding as everything else is. But I'm lying to myself.....at least sometimes. And I think so often it's that way with, "Oh, God, I'm so sorry." We're not sorry. We just want things to get better. If I could continue to do something and have no consequence, I would do that. So that's not repentance. That's just kind of fooling myself.

Well, anyway, the children of Israel are in trouble again, and they're over-matched. They could be annihilated. Well then there was this woman, verse 6, "Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time." So, while the oppression was taking place, there was already a prophet who was judging. So she's not just sent as a deliverer; she was in power while the sin continued, God having someone, if you will, available already. And we read, verse 5, "And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment." So she's a prophetess that God used. She was a faithful wife. She was a judge. In fact Samuel, when we get to 1 Samuel, is the only one in the Bible called a prophet and a judge, except for Deborah (well, except for Jesus). And she, in chapter 5 (which we're going to look at next week - I think we might just spend the week in chapter 5 next week), calls herself, in verse 7, "the mother in Israel." She not only was a godly woman and a wonderful wife and a good ruler, but she took a maternal kind of interest in God's people. She loved them as her own. So she's quite a lady. I wrote in my Bible years ago, "An ounce of mother is worth a pound of clergy." You believe that, don't you? I mean, moms are the best. And she was a mother to Israel. She was one that would serve. And the people weren't doing well, but they would turn to her when they wanted to know what God had to say.

Well, in any event (notice from verse 3), they had begun to pray for deliverance - whatever their motivation was. And so they prayed for a time, as she sat in her place of judgment. And one day, verse 6, "Then she sent and called for Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, 'Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded, "Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali" ' " (that's his tribe) " ' "and of the sons of Zebulun; and against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hand?" ' " And so one day the prophetess speaks up, and she calls on this fellow, Barak, and she said, "I want you to get ten thousand guys together. Go down in the

valley, down by the river, and I'm going to send this big army (way outmatching you), and God's going to wipe them out with you. So you go now, Barak." And that was the cry.

Well, Mr. Sissy Boy says this, verse 8, "Barak said to her, 'If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!' " Translation: "Hey, if that's your prophecy, let's you stand right next to me and see if that works out for you. You're asking me to walk by faith. Will you go with me?" And so her answer to him was, verse 9, " 'I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.' " Then Deborah got up, and she went back to where she was staying. And she took him with her. So her response to this sissy was, "I'll go with you, but you're not going to get any glory out of this" which, by the way, sounds horrible in this male-dominated society to be told, "A woman's going to have the victory, and you're just going to look like a sap. No journey for you, no glory for you in the journey." It's almost like the LORD was treating these children of Israel like kids, like they needed their mom to go along. You know? I thought about Isaiah. He said one time, kind of chiding the children of Israel, "My people are treated like children by their oppressors and women rule over them regularly" (Isaiah 3:12). It was kind of like, "You guys never grow up and just trust the LORD," and it's kind of the classic example, I think, of not growing up spiritually. So Barak, he recognized God's anointing on Deborah's life; he wasn't willing to recognize it on his own.

Well in verse 10, "Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; he went up with ten thousand men under his command, and Deborah went up with him" because he couldn't go by himself. God marks that. And there's a fellow, in the meantime, named Heber. Verse 11, "Now Heber the Kenite, of the children of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, had separated himself from the Kenites and pitched his tent near the terebinth tree at Zaanaim, which is beside Kedesh." Let's just say he moved to the north. And while he was there, verse 12, "They reported to Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor." So here's the story. The Kenites were the descendants of Moses' father-in-law, Jethro. They had followed Israel into the land when the LORD gave the land to them. They were Bedouins, which means they didn't have any place to live. They settled mostly in the south by Beersheba. One of their families, though, headed by this fellow Heber, moved north, and he became a traitor to Israel and to their cause. And so when Israel began to position itself as Deborah had told Barak to do, he passed along the information. Now, usually Bedouins are neutral in politics because they

have to live in a lot of different places. So, because they want to move here and there, they don't want to make anybody mad. But this guy was a traitor, and he informed Sisera what was going on.

Verse 13 says, "So Sisera gathered together all his chariots," (and God uses even the traitors) "nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people who were with him, from Harosheth Hagoyim to the River Kishon. Then Deborah said to Barak, 'Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the LORD gone out before you?' So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. And the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot. But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth Hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left." So Deborah, the prophetess, says to Barak, "All right. Today's the day, man. We're going to go fight. It's today." And to his credit, Sissy Boy, this time, goes. It's almost like he's become convinced that, with ten thousand men against nine hundred chariots, he stands a chance, or he has come to believe that the LORD will give him victory. In fact, if you go to Hebrews 11:32 there is a comment that says, "And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak....." and so he's mentioned as a man of faith, and I suspect this is the action of faith. It wasn't the, "I won't go unless you go," but it was when he was finally told to get going, he did go down to fight. Right? And the only way he could do that, clearly, was to trust the LORD because there was no advantage for him to try to fight nine hundred chariots. But, again, if the LORD is with you, nine hundred chariots mean nothing. Right?

So, verse 15, "And the LORD routed Sisera." The word is to confuse. In chapter 5:21 (and we'll see it next week as it's kind of mentioned in songs), the LORD brought an unseasonable kind of rainstorm to bear on the Kishon, which is normally a brook which then turned into a river. And so God intervened. And you can have nine hundred chariots, but if they get stuck in the mud, they're useless. And apparently they all got stuck in the mud, and God fought with them. Well, now, here's the interesting comparison since we talked a little bit about the Canaanites. The chief god of the Canaanites was Baal, who was the god of the storm, of the weather. So God met their god in the fields and whooped on 'em. Right? He brought rain when there shouldn't have been rain. Their fertility gods, who brought rain and dew, God overthrows their god in a place that they think he should rule. So it was a pretty good witness as well.

Well, needless to say, as we read, this fellow, Sisera (verse 17) had gotten off of his chariot and was running for his life. Verse 16 said nobody had survived this, but he's getting away. And so, verse 17, "Sisera had fled away on foot to the tent of Jael," another woman, "the wife of" (this traitor) "Heber the Kenite; for there was peace between Jabin king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite." In other words, her husband had made a deal with that guy. Verse 18, "And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, 'Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; do not fear.' And when he had turned aside with her into the tent, she covered him with a blanket. Then he said to her, 'Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.' So she opened a jug of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him. And he said to her, 'Stand at the door of the tent, and if any man comes and inquires of you, and says, "Is there any man here?" you shall say, "No." ' ' " And she said, "Okay, I can do that." Verse 21, "Then Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went down into the ground; for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died. And then, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said to him," ("Hey, check out who I just caught!"), " 'Come, I will show you the man whom you seek.' And when he went into her tent, there lay Sisera, dead with the peg in his temple," on the side of his head. Verse 23, "So on that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan in the presence of the children of Israel. And the hand of the children of Israel grew stronger and stronger against Jabin king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan." So, just as the prophetess had said, a woman, Jael (she was a tough woman - you wouldn't really want to criticize her cooking, I wouldn't think) (Laughing). In Deborah's song next week, when we go through this song, there're lots of things to learn there. In verse 24, she's honored. We read, "Most blessed among women is Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; blessed is she among women in tents. He asked for water, she gave milk; she brought out cream in a lordly bowl." (I guess he gave him a lot of milk). "She stretched her hand to the tent peg, her right hand to the workmen's hammer; she pounded Sisera, she pierced his head, she split and struck through his temple. At her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still; at her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell dead." Imagine putting that in a song! Doo dah, doo dah....(Laughing) Hit his head and split his head, all the doo dah day..... Yeah!

So I want you to notice (in verses 23 and 24) that this time the deliverance was started; over time, though, it became more permanent. This time, there wasn't a solid one day of deliverance, but it says that "Israel grew stronger," and eventually they were able to overthrow the Canaanite king. So, this time they couldn't just

get a deliverance. God had them waiting and trusting Him and extending their deliverance out over a period of time to draw them in, to give them help.

So, Othniel and Ehud and Shamgar and Deborah and this guy, Barak, who came around - look at the kinds of people God uses. But learn the lesson - no matter how God has blessed you, if you don't stick with Him, you're going to do this.....right? In times of plenty, go to church, man. Get on your knees. Pray a lot when God is blessing. Oh, you'll pray when things are tough. Nobody has to tell you that, then. But when things are good, maybe stay close. And whether you're well-prepared like Othniel; or whether you, like Ehud, are handicapped; or like Shamgar - nobody really knows about you, you're humbled, and you're a farmer and you don't even have a weapon; or Deborah, who had a people that wasn't listening even when she was preaching, and when she led, eventually they followed, but it took a long time for people to straighten out. God can use you. We need good leaders, but we also should be aware of the fact that there's a propensity in all of our hearts to go downhill, not uphill. And spiritual life is always uphill. If you're not trying, you're sliding back, right? You're not putting the effort in, you're not going to make any progress. So may the Lord help us to do just that.

Next week, we're only going to look at chapter 5. So you only have to read one chapter. Try to find the tune there, and we'll sing it together.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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