

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: JUDGES 3:7-31**

To learn about Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar.

## Watch the Time

A large portion of my job, my calling, and really just who I am, takes place behind a keyboard. I write a lot. Between curriculum for adults, curriculum for youth, sermons, lessons, articles, and research papers, I spend a sizable amount of time at my desk, typing away. There are times when it is so daunting. One paragraph feels like it takes me forever. However, usually, when I get into what writers call a, “flow state,” I can get lost in writing as well. There have been nights I have sat down to write a part of a sermon or Bible study, and the next thing I know, it’s 1:30am and I’ve written the whole thing! I have to watch the time when I’m writing, because it’s easy to get lost in it. Similarly, it’s easy to get lost in reading too. Have you ever done that? Have you ever picked up a book and started reading it only to discover that minutes or even hours had passed without you even realizing it? Time is an interesting foe, to be sure.

Time is also quite easy to lose track of when you are reading a narrative in Scripture. It’s not always super clear how much time has passed over the course of the events described in the text. Daniel, for example, covers the scope of decades, and yet when we read Daniel it doesn’t feel like much time passes for him at all. Sometimes, time is explicitly communicated, and it still doesn’t really resonate with us. Judges chapter 3 is one of those examples. Between the first two judges, Othniel and Ehud, nearly 100 years passes. There are 8 years of servitude under the Mesopotamian king Cushan-rishathaim, followed by 40 years of rest. Then Israel sins and finds themselves in servitude to the Moabite king Eglon for 18 years, followed by 80 years of rest.

Given the brevity of story development, it's easy to pass over these time figures and not really account for the reality that Judges 3:7-31 account for nearly a century!

## Othniel

The first judge to judge and save Israel is, "Othniel, the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother." He is the most righteous of the judges to deliver Israel, as demonstrated by the fact that nothing negative is said about him at all. Nothing else is mentioned of him in this passage. This is not, however, the first time we have heard Othniel's name. In Judges 1:11-15, Caleb offered his daughter Achsah as a bride to anyone who, "attack Kiriath-sepher and captures it" (Jdg. 1:12). Below is a breakdown of some other critical characters in this passage.

### **CALEB**

This is, of course, *the* Caleb you have almost certainly heard of before if you've read the Torah. He is chosen by Moses as a representative of the tribe of Judah to spy out the land of Canaan (Num. 13:3), and eventually given the land of Hebron by Joshua (Josh. 14:13-14). Caleb represents the generation that knew Joshua and obeyed God, and Othniel represents the new, disobedient generation. Othniel's introduction in chapter 1 is purposeful, then, as it anticipates his rise as a judge here in chapter 3.

### **CUSHAN-RISHATHAIM**

The Mesopotamian king that stands in contrast to Othniel is a fairly mysterious figure. Several attempts have been made to connect him to various historical figures, but none of them are convincing. There aren't exactly a plethora of sources that date this far back that we have available today, and so the inability to connect Cushan-rishathaim to a historical figure should not invite skepticism. What we do know, from the text, is that he was a king of Mesopotamia, and that his surname ("Rishathaim") means, "doubly wicked." He was apparently not a friendly guy. The area called *Mesopotamia* (lit. "Between the rivers") is simply the land between the Tigris and Euphrates. Cushan's identity is largely irrelevant to the point of the story. Israel is captured and subservient to a wicked king as a *result* of their disobedience towards Yahweh. Cushan simply serves as a means of judgment over Israel until they repent.

Othniel's narrative really sets the stage for what we should expect in the book of Judges: perpetual sin, God's judgment through captivity, repentance, a judge raised up to save Israel, and peace for the people. There will be added details and varying different circumstances, but the general direction is the same in each of these stories.

## Ehud

The second judge to judge Israel is a man by the name of Ehud, and his narrative is a bit more colorful. Israel is captured this time for 18 years (instead of 8), but are again *saved* by Ehud, another judge that God raises up. Below are some important details of some key characters and concepts.

### **EHUD**

Ehud's identity is not as significant as Othniel's as he is not connected to anyone from the Joshua era. This makes sense simply because of the timeline; there was 40 years of peace after Othniel judged Israel! There are, though, some interesting and even ironic details about Ehud. First, the text informs us that he is a Benjaminite. This doesn't seem too strange right now, but when we get to chapters 19 through 21, we find out that Benjamin is decimated by civil war as a result of some really bad things that happen in a place called Gibeah. The tribe of Benjamin becomes even more well-known not too long after Judges when one of its

descendants, Saul, becomes the first king of Israel. Interestingly, *Benjamin* can be literally translated, “son of the right hand.” Ehud is a, “son of the right hand,” but is actually, “left-handed!” (Jdg. 3:15) Apparently, because of his accolades as a judge, a Benjaminite clan is named after him as well (1 Chr. 7:10).

### **EGLON**

Eglon, the Moabite king, is a memorable character in the book of Judges. He was, “a very fat man” (Jdg. 3:17), a reality that will play a descriptive role in his death. The Moabites, unlike some of the other nations in opposition to Israel in Judges, were actually ancestors to Israel! The Moabites descended from Lot, Abraham’s nephew (Gen. 19:36-37). Beyond that, Eglon forged alliances with other people groups that likely had scores they were ready to settle with Israel. The Ammonites were also ancestors of Israel, and forced out of the land in Numbers 21:21-24, and so their alliance with Moab may have been motivated by the prospect of regaining their territory. The Amalekites were first seen in the Exodus narrative as a hostile group towards Israel. Their hostility was costly, however, as God swore to, “utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven” (Ex. 17:14).

Eglon’s demise comes after the left-handed Ehud sneakily stabs Eglon in the stomach after his guards vacate the room, and this is where Eglon’s size comes into play: “And the hilt also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not pull the sword out of his belly; and the dung came out” (Jdg. 3:22). To make matters turn from bad to embarrassing, the guards did not protect Eglon because, “They thought, ‘surely he is relieving himself in the closet of the cool chamber’” (Jdg. 3:24).

### **WHERE IS GOD?**

One troubling aspect of this story is the silence of God during these events. It raises the question of whether or not Ehud was even truly aware of his role. Even Ehud’s tactics are questionable, as they rely heavily upon deception and stealth and not divine power. The only mention of God is after Ehud’s escape from Eglon’s chambers, when he rallies the Israeli troops and cries out, “Follow after me, for the LORD has given your enemies the Moabites into your hand” (Jdg. 3:28). The following peace after the defeat of the Moabites lasted 80 years (Jdg. 3:30).

## **Shamgar**

Shamgar’s mention has puzzled commentators for a long time, as his narrative is a mere one verse. He, like the other judges however, is able to perform seemingly super-human feats with ridiculous means. Shamgar defeats, “600 of the Philistines with an oxgoad” (Jdg. 3:31). His name is also puzzling. He is, “the son of Anath,” Anath being the name of a female Canaanite god. Whether his mother was named after this deity, or he himself was a devotee of this deity is unclear. One theme throughout the book of Judges, however, is the slow process of Israel becoming more and more like Canaan (which is a bad thing). It might be that Shamgar’s mention is a foreshadowing of that process which will follow.

## **What About Now?**

What do we take away from stories like these? Well, for one, God is willing to both bring judgment on Israel, and also redeem them after they repent. This is not too unlike our relationship with Him today, although our relationship mirrors the way God dealt with David more than the judges. God is willing to discipline us as our loving Heavenly Father, but never abandon us (2 Sam. 7:14-15). Secondly, these chapters speak to the reality that God can use literally anyone to accomplish His purposes, even if they are not fully aware of it. Cushan, Eglon, and even Ehud to an extent are used by God in spite of their lack of awareness of His divine actions.

## Study Questions

### Day One

1. Read Judges 3:7-8. What did the people of Israel do in the sight of the LORD? Who did God raise up to bring judgment upon them?

---

---

2. Read Judges 3:9-11. Who did God raise up to save and judge Israel? What was significant about him? Who was his father-in-law? For how long did Israel experience peace?

---

---

### Day Two

1. Read Judges 3:12-14. Who did God raise up to bring judgment upon Israel? Who did Eglon enlist to help him fight against Israel? According to the notes, what was significant about these two nations?

---

---

2. Read Judges 3:15-17. What did the people of God do? Who did God raise up as a judge for them? According to the notes, what was ironic about Ehud's status as a Benjaminite?

---

---

### Day Three

1. Read Judges 3:18-23. In your own words, describe the events in this passage.

---

---

2. Read Judges 3:24-25. After Ehud left, why did the servants of the king not immediately enter? What did they think he was doing? What did they find when they entered?

---

---

### Day Four

1. Read Judges 3:26-30. Where did Ehud escape to? What did he do in the hill country of Ephraim? What did he say to them? What happened as a result of these events? How long did Israel have peace?

---

---

2. Read Judges 3:31. Who is described here? How is he described? According to the notes, who is Anath? What did Shamgar do?

---

---

## Week 3 Discussion: Unlikely People

We often find God using the most unlikely people to accomplish His purposes in the book of Judges. Wicked foreign kings like Cushan-rishathaim and Eglon are both great examples of men being used to bring about the divine will of God, and they aren't even aware of their role in it. Even some of the judges, like Ehud and Shamgar, don't seem to be fully connected to the significance of their identity. God is not bound by anything, and He can use anyone to bring about what He desires. Talk as a group about how God has used the unlikely to bring about change in your life.

1. Icebreaker: Have you ever learned a spiritual lesson through someone you would have never expected to learn from? Share with the group your experience.
2. Have you ever received clarity on a spiritual concept through a non-spiritual source (e.g. TV show, movie, book, or event)?
3. "If God can use unlikely people, He can use you." How does this statement make you feel?
4. Do you think you have to be qualified to some extent before God can use you to bring about change in someone else's life? Why or why not?
5. How valuable is small-group participation in light of God's propensity to use others to comfort us and bring clarity to things He is trying to teach us?
6. How has the church historically stood in the way of God using unlikely people?

## Takeaways:

1. The people of Israel fell under the judgment of Cushan-rishathaim and Eglon because of their disobedience.
2. God raised up Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar to save Israel.

### **PRAYER REQUESTS:**