ISRALE’S DELIVERERS

Judges 3:1~31

Key Verse: 9

“But when they cried out to the LORD, he raised up for them a deliverer.”

After the death of Joshua, the Israelites failed to drive the Canaanites out of their lands. Instead of forcing them out, they enslaved them. Israel ignored the influences of the deep-rooted sins of Canaan while overconfident in their control. Above all, it was disobedience to God's commands and a break of the covenant with God. God pointed out the seriousness of their sins and said that God would not drive them out either in 2:1-3.

2:1-3 The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, "I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers. I said, 'I will never break my covenant with you, 2and you shall not make a covenant with the people of this land, but you shall break down their altars.' Yet you have disobeyed me. Why have you done this? 3 Now, therefore, I tell you that I will not drive them out before you; they will be thorns in your sides, and their gods will be a snare to you."

As time passed, the generations who experienced the conquest of Canaan died. The new generation born in the land of Canaan became mainstream and intermarried with them and worshipped idols. As a result of that sin, they were oppressed by the Gentiles. God sent deliverers to them for over 350 years during the period of the Judges. Today's passage records three judges/deliverers, Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar. Through the message, we may learn about the following:

•Our spiritual warfare

•Obedience to God’s commands

•God’s salvation through the judges

Let’s look at verses 1-5. Judges Chapter 3 begins by identifying those undefeated nations. These nations include the five Philistine cities: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath, the Canaanite countries, the Sidonians, and the Hivites; and the nations dwelling with Israel: Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. These unconquered enemies would be a source of attack and struggle for Israel for years.

Here the Israelites that had no battle experience refer to the new generations that do not know God personally and experientially. The reasons God left those nations undriven are explained in verses 1, 2, and 4. God focuses on two things.

First, to teach the Israelites warfare. Why warfare and not peace? Warfare implies there is an enemy that they have to fight against. God's people must inevitably learn warfare. God redeemed them with the blood of the Passover lamb, made them a holy people, and his treasured possession, chosen out of the world. Even though God's people live in the world, they are not of the world but belong to God. For this identity, God's children cannot inherently befriend the world that idolizes materials and pleasures. This is why God teaches us spiritual warfare.

Also, the apostle Paul described God's children as good soldiers of Christ Jesus. The soldiers of Christ Jesus fight against the forces of evil spirits, sin, and Satan. You have to fight against the idols of the world, and you have to fight every day against our sinful desires and against Satan behind all of them. Therefore, we must learn spiritual warfare. We must firmly demonstrate our identity as the children of God and soldiers of Christ Jesus, and we must know what we are fighting against- the enemies. You have to fight until the end to win against the world's idols.

Ephesus 6 says: 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people. God's children are fighters. Christians are soldiers.

The second reason was to test whether Israel would obey God's commands. Warfare is a battle against external enemies; this test is against internal disobedience to God’s commands. Obedience to God's commands is not always easy. God's Word must always take priority over my thoughts. Our self-denial must accompany it. All of God's commands are based on the Ten Commandments. It is to put only God in the center of our hearts and worship him only. In other words, to get rid of any idols other than God. God's children today are in a spiritual crisis. Like the Israelites in this passage, they have no enemies, so no warfare experience. They are reluctant to fight spiritual battles and are allergic to the concept of obedience to God’s Word, but accept easily the things of the world that make them wealthy, relaxed, cool and fun. But if something or someone is keeping you or tempting you away from God, it is an idol to be eliminated and to fight against. I pray that we may obey God's commands every day.

A few weeks ago, Eunice and Jonathan did a taekwondo belt test. Basic movements and Taegeuk 1 and 2 must be memorized and mastered. All actions must be performed according to the rules to pass the test. Just as there are rules and tests in sports, we are put to the test every day, and the rules of life for God's children are the Word of God, the Holy Bible. God wants us to live a life of obedience according to His commands. Obedience to God's Word may seem foolish to the eyes of the world, but in the end, it turns out to be the wisest life, and it is the key to a blessed life and eternal life.

The people of Israel, however, chose to disobey God by living alongside the Canaanites in the territories. This became a source of temptation to idolatry and all that comes with it. Let’s look at verses 6~7.

6 They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods. 7 The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs.

There are a few steps for Israel to turn into an idol worshiper. Israel lived among the Canaanites, began intermarrying with them, forgot their God, and served Baal and Asherah. Despite God's strong warnings, the Israelites intermarried with the other nations and served their gods. Sadly, the object of their worship changed from God to Baals and Asherahs. The center of their lives has changed from God to material things and the pleasures of the world. Worship of these false gods includes sexual acts and evil practices such as human and child sacrifice.

They might have conceited that they would only live among the Canaanites but never turn away from God, and their faith would never be shaken by intermarrying with them. They might have thought that they could convert the Canaanites to the LORD. However, as time passed and they were chased by the hardships of life, they and their children ended up serving idols. When we compromise with the world one by one without obeying the Word absolutely, not a few people forget God and live by compromising with worldly materials and pleasures. Then, at some point, you realize you are living the same as the world. If we do not put God first and keep pushing him to the back, God will eventually be in the last place. The problem always starts with very tiny compromises. We must have 'absolute' obedience to the Word of God. We must not allow even the slightest gap for idols to enter.

Let’s look at verse 8. **The anger of the LORD burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram Naharaim, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years.** Here, ‘Cushan-Rishathaim king’ means 'Cushan double-wicked king.' When the people forgot Him and served the false gods, God sold them into the hand of 'the doubly wicked’ Cushan, the king of Mesopotamia. That king ruled over the Israelites for eight years.

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.** After 8 years of oppression, the people cried out to the Lord, and the LORD raised up a deliverer. Seeing that God immediately responded to Israel's SOS, God's test aimed not to punish and destroy but to bring Israel back to the LORD.

The first judge was Othniel, the son of Caleb's younger brother, who was already introduced in Judges 1. God used Othniel to lead the Israelites into battle against the Mesopotamians and defeat them.

How did he become a judge and finally deliver Israel from the enemy? Let’s look at 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. The secret to Othniel's victory was the Spirit of God. Because the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, he became the first judge of Israel and saved Israel from the enemy. We learn that no matter how difficult the situation is and how vicious the enemy is, the Spirit of the LORD enables us to stand up and fight and win spiritual battles. Zechariah 4:6 says, "It is not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the LORD." Even Jesus said to His disciples in Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." See verse 11. So the land had peace for forty years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died. Israel was at peace for 40 years—a full generation—until Othniel died.

Let’s look at verse 12-14. **12 Once again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and because they did this evil the LORD gave Eglon king of Moab power over Israel. 13 Getting the Ammonites and Amalekites to join him, Eglon came and attacked Israel, and they took possession of the City of Palms. 14 The Israelites were subject to Eglon king of Moab for eighteen years.**

After Othniel's death, a new generation again turned from God, following the Canaanite evil practice. They worshiped and served false gods. This time, the Lord enabled the king of the Moabites to grow strong enough to defeat the Israelites. King Eglon allied with the Ammonites and the Amalekites and defeated Israel, enslaving the people for 18 years.

Look at verse 15. **Again the Israelites cried out to the LORD, and he gave them a deliverer Ehud, a left-handed man, the son of Gera the Benjamite. The Israelites sent him with tribute to Eglon king of Moab.** After 18 years, the people finally cried out to the Lord for help, and God raised a new deliverer, Ehud. The author marked him as a left-handed Benjaminite man. We do not know whether he had a disabled right hand or not. However, given the context, his appearance was not considered threatening at all. After him, the tribe of Benjamin will eventually become well-known for their mighty left-handed warriors. We see that Ehud had a significant influence as a left-handed warrior.

**Look at verses 16-25**. Ehud led a delegation sent to present a tribute to Eglon, king of Moab, at his palace in Jericho. Ehud made a special dagger and secured it to his right thigh, under his clothes. After presenting the tribute, Ehud sent his group back, but he himself turned back to the king of Moab, said that he has a secret message for him. Thinking that Ehud had prepared a great gift, Eglon sent all his servants out of the room. Then Ehud pulled out his sword and stabbed the king, who is enormously fat, leaving the sword buried in his belly. The result of the wound is a gory mess, and Eglon apparently dropped dead without making a sound. Ehud locked the doors and walked away. Eglon's servants found the doors locked. After enough time passed, they found the king dead.

Surprisingly, Ehud didn’t stop but took a big step further. **Look at verses 26-30. 26 While they waited, Ehud got away. He passed by the idols and escaped to Seirah. 27 When he arrived there, he blew a trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went down with him from the hills, with him leading them. 28 "Follow me," he ordered, "for the LORD has given Moab, your enemy, into your hands." So they followed him down and, taking possession of the fords of the Jordan that led to Moab, they allowed no one to cross over. 29 At that time they struck down about ten thousand Moabites, all vigorous and strong; not a man escaped. 30 That day Moab was made subject to Israel, and the land had peace for eighty years.**

Ehud gathered an army of Israelite fighters and led them to take strategic crossings of the Jordan River. Once the Moabites' escape route was cut off, the Israelite army killed 10,000 Moabite soldiers in the land. The Lord gave Israel a great victory, and peace returned to the land for eighty years.

Look at verse 31. **31 After Ehud came Shamgar son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad. He too saved Israel.** The third deliverer was Shamgar son of Anath. There are no details about a figure named Shamgar. Scholars say this name might imply a Canaanite or Egyptian rather than an Israelite. All we know is that Shamgar's actions saved Israel somehow from a Philistine invasion from the north. Shamgar's weapon was an oxgoad. All at once, or over time, Shamgar killed six hundred Philistines.

We saw Israel's sins and their hopeless situation in desperate need of salvation from their enemies. God raised three deliverers for them and saved them. Without the Spirit of God, without the help of our Deliverer Jesus, we cannot overcome our weakness, nor can we fight and overcome sin, Satan, and idols of the world.

In Conclusion, we learned from today's passage that God teaches us spiritual warfare and tests us to know obedience to God's words. Above all, he helps us to fight and win the spiritual battle by giving us the Holy Spirit. I pray that we may experience the living God in our daily spiritual warfare.