

• *Judges raised up to preserve the nation – the first three of fourteen*

Three Principles

1. God never lets His people decline beyond recovery

2. The restoration generally came through individuals

3. New ‘rescuers’ are needed in each generation

Three Judges

1. Othniel whose personal details are kept secret

• *Israel’s unfaithfulness arouses God’s anger*

• *God is eventually moved by His people’s distress*

• *A saviour*

• *Enabled by the Holy Spirit*

• *The outcome of victory – ‘entering into rest’*

Judges 3:5–16:31 is the central section of our book. The narrator has told of the origin of chaos and idolatry in Israel ^{☞1} and of the judges that God raised up to preserve the nation. Now in 3:5–16:31 he tells the stories of various judges. There are fourteen main characters: Othniel ^{☞2}, Ehud ^{☞3}, Shamgar ^{☞4}, Deborah and Barak ^{☞5}, Gideon ^{☞6}, Abimelech ^{☞7}, Tola ^{☞8}, Jair ^{☞9}, Jephthah ^{☞10}, Ibzan ^{☞11}, Elon ^{☞12}, Abdon ^{☞13}, and Samson ^{☞14}.

First we have three principles.

1. God never lets His people decline beyond recovery; eventually He sends rescuers. Just as there is a principle of decline in the church, there is a principle of loyalty to His people in God! The church declines; God restores.

2. The restoration generally came through individuals. God would raise up these ‘judges’ to come to the aid of Israel and bring them back to God. If we wish to be used by God we have to be somewhat – not too much! – individualistic. God gives His people ‘saviours’ to work with them. I do not mean to deny the value of ‘teamwork’, but God’s ‘saviours’ have a mind of their own. They stand against the trend and they call people back to God. They take actions in withstanding the successes of paganism and overthrowing the enemies of God.

3. New ‘rescuers’ are needed in each generation. The people of God tend to wander like sheep. We stay loyal to God while the strong leader is around. As soon as he goes, we reveal our amazing tendency to fall away from God. Soon we need rescuing again!

Next we have three judges: Othniel ^{☞1}, Ehud ^{☞2}, Shamgar ^{☞3}.

1. Othniel was a man whose personal details are kept secret. In the way in which the story is told, Othniel is a somewhat colourless rescuer for Israel; we know nothing about his personal character. There is probably a reason why the story of this first judge is told without any personal detail. God’s restorations are more stories about God than stories about human heroes. God wants us to learn about Himself more than about Othniel.

Israel’s unfaithfulness arouses God’s anger. For reasons that have already been explained, Israel was living among the Canaanites ^{☞1} and this soon led to idolatry ^{☞2}. They worshipped false gods, following the customs of their pagan neighbours ^{☞3}. This made God angry ^{☞4} and the result was defeat for Israel at the hands of a king in the area north of them, in Aram-Naharaim. For eight years there was oppression by this king, whose name was Cushan-Rishathaim ^{☞5}.

God is eventually moved by His people’s distress. The people cried to God and God answered ^{☞1}.

God raises up a saviour. The particular way in which God answers the cries of His people is to send a person who will be able to help them. God likes to send people to help people. Othniel is God’s gift to Israel at this time; he was Caleb’s nephew ^{☞1}.

The rescuer needed to have the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of Yahweh came upon Othniel ^{☞1} and he went out to war against Cushan-Rishathaim. He did his work not simply by his own ability but by a special enabling of the Holy Spirit.

The outcome of victorious work for God was ‘rest’ ^{☞1}. This is what ‘entering into rest’ is – it is the reward of one’s labours after one has inherited the promises of God by diligent works of faith. ‘Rest’ is enjoyment of the blessings of God, the reward of diligent faith.

- ☞1 1:1–3:4
- ☞2 3:7–11
- ☞3 3:12–30
- ☞4 3:31
- ☞5 4:1–5:31
- ☞6 6:1–8:32
- ☞7 8:33–9:57
- ☞8 10:1–2
- ☞9 10:3–5
- ☞10 10:6–12:7
- ☞11 12:8–10
- ☞12 12:11–12
- ☞13 12:13–15
- ☞14 13:1–6:31

- ☞1 3:7–11
- ☞2 2:12–30
- ☞3 3:3 1

- ☞1 3:5
- ☞2 3:6
- ☞3 3:7
- ☞4 3:8a
- ☞5 3:8b

- ☞1 3:9

- ☞1 3:9

- ☞1 3:10

- ☞1 3:11

2. Ehud – a man with a personal defect in his life

• Former victories had been reversed – ground lost

• The people call on God and He sends another saviour

• A deformed and unusable right hand

• The very thing that God used was Ehud's greatest weakness!

2. **Ehud was a man with a personal defect in his life.** Again Israel became careless; God allowed Moab to the south of Israel to rise up in opposition against Israel ¹. Moab had support from the Ammonites and the Amalekites ². Israel's great victory of previous years was reversed. They lost 'the city of palm trees'. This was in the area when Jericho had existed and then had been destroyed. Years before the people of Israel had a mighty victory in this very area, near Jericho. Now the victory they had been famous for before, was reversed and they were failures in the very area where they had been a success before.

The people responded wisely. They had sinned badly and suffered for eighteen years ¹ but they were brought by their sufferings to know what to do: they called upon God and asked for mercy ². God's answer to their plight was to send them a saviour – Ehud. He had a great weakness. His right hand was damaged and deformed and was quite unusable ³.

God can use a person who has a personal defect in his life. Ehud was left handed. In ancient Israel where left-handedness was regarded as odd and even wicked, it would have meant that he had grown up as an odd character. But actually the very thing that was odd about Ehud was the thing God used. The Israelites had to send people to pay tribute to Eglon of Moab ¹. Ehud went as one of the people paying the tribute. He made a specially designed dagger ². It was worn on the right side; it was not the place where one would look for daggers but Ehud was left-handed. It was long and thin. After the delegation had left, Ehud went back alone, pretending to have a special message for Eglon from God ³. Eglon looked at Ehud; there was no weapon hanging at his left side. So he sent everyone out and waited for the message from Ehud's God. Ehud was speaking quietly. He had a secret message from God! Eglon arose to have Ehud whisper the message to him ⁴. Then Ehud made use of his weakness, his left hand, and the long and thin dagger was put to good use as well ⁵! Soon Eglon was dead. Ehud made a quick but calm withdrawal ⁶. The servants waited long enough for him to escape ⁷. The Israelites were called to war ⁸ and Moab was defeated ⁹. Again the reward for faith was 'rest' ¹⁰. Ehud's 'deformity' was the very thing God used. On Ehud's part it took bold and confident faith that God would use the very thing about him which was his greatest weakness!

¹ 3:12

² 3:13

¹ 3:14

² 3:15a

³ 3:15b

¹ 3:15c

² 3:16

³ 3:17–19a

⁴ 3:19b–20

⁵ 3:19b–22

⁶ 3:23

⁷ 3:24–25

⁸ 3:26–29

⁹ 3:30

¹⁰ 3:3 1

3. Shamgar - a man with inadequate equipment

3. **Shamgar was a man with inadequate equipment** ¹. We have seen that Ehud had a weakness in his body. Shamgar had a weakness in his equipment – but he used what he had. One man was odd; another man had an odd weapon. But God made His power obvious in human weakness.

¹ 3:31



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