

Thoughts From Other Minds:

For all this, we must nevertheless observe the tragedy of the story why it's sad. To be sure, Ehud escaped, called out his troops, ... and defeated Moab's finest troops (vv.26-30a). But the story is sad in the long run, since 'the sons of Israel again did evil in the eyes of Yahweh when Ehud had died' (4:1; a sort of refrain throughout Judges; see 3:12, 10:6, 13:1;

Ehud, sorry to say, is not a totally adequate saviour ... He may have exerted some beneficial influence on them while he lived (4:1, cf.2:17,19), but he could not release Israel from the bondage of sin or rip the idols out of their hearts. Here is the tragedy of the people of God - slavery to sin ('again did evil') – and no left-handed saviour spilling the guts of foreign kings can release you from that bondage. Helplessness indeed. ... being 'under sin' (Rom. 3:9).

Note: not sins but sin. Sin is not merely or primarily, act but power Being 'under sin', is to be held in its clutches, bound by its chain

When my father was teaching me to ride a two-wheel bike, he would have me get on the bike while he held it, then give me a run-along shove until I was going and keeping my balance; then I rode until I crashed. I had one difficulty. I could not make turns. I could not turn the handlebars. ... One Wednesday evening my father wanted to start me off in our driveway, which was perpendicular to the highway that ran through town. I protested, since I feared I could not turn at the end of the drive and go down the sidewalk. I wanted to get my start on the sidewalk. But with that canny ability parents sometimes have to remain oblivious to their child's fears, Pop gave me my start and off I rode. Past the big pine tree, past the turn to the sidewalk, down the end of the driveway, straight into the back fender of a '51 Plymouth that was breezing into town. Again, I was well aware of what I had to do. I needed to turn the handlebars to the right and go down the sidewalk. But I could not do it. I was in bondage. I was helpless to do even what I knew I had to do. Irrational perhaps; but nonetheless real. Such, too, is the bondage of sin.

Now some ... may say: 'Yes, yes; but remember, we are not a bunch of primitive Israelite idol worshipers; we are the people of God.' And so was Israel. All of them circumcised, card-carrying Israelites, and in utter bondage to sin And one may be a baptized, catechised, organised Presbyterian - yet a slave of sin. The same goes for Baptists, Methodists, whomever. That's why it is such good news to hear of 'him who loves us and has set us free from our sins at the cost of his blood' (Rev. 1:5). For our real bondage does not consist of Moabites or fat kings or physical and economic oppression. No left-handed saviour can break us free from our tyrant. But there is One with nail-scarred hands who can and does. The only tragedy in our story will be if, having this Saviour, we do not 'cry to him for help' for Yahweh has raised up for us a Saviour, Jesus, who shall save his people from their sins.

Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges, Such a Great Salvation*, pp. 63-64

Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Charge

1 May 2016

Sermon: "Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar – pointing us to Jesus" (text Judges 3:7-31)

Scripture: Judges 3:1-31

Sermon Notes

Introduction: Judges continues the story of Israel's continuing conquest and occupation of Canaan after Joshua died. A flawed beginning (1:1-2:6) ended with the people breaking their covenant with the Lord; not wholly trusting the Lord they couldn't drive out the Canaanites; then, when stronger, they put them to forced labour—and so the Lord declared that he would not drive them out (2:2b-3).

Then (2:6-3:6) the historian gives an overview of Judges—repeated cycles of disobedience, judgment, remorse, salvation and blessing. After the generation that had seen all the great works that the Lord had done for Israel died another generation arose 'that did not know the Lord or the work he had done for Israel' (2:10) - and they did evil, and provoked the Lord, who brought them into terrible distress.

Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them—but they would not listen to them, but worshipped idols; when the judge died, they 'turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers, going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them' (2:19); so the Lord left the Canaanites in the land to teach his people war and to test their obedience—but they became like the Canaanites (3:5-6).

1. A guilty people

The first cycle of sin, judgment and salvation is with the first three judges—Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar. The people of Israel, God's people, were in covenant with the Lord who had brought them out of Egypt and into the land of Canaan—and yet once they were comfortably in the land instead of serving him with glad thanksgiving they forgot him and served the gods of the Canaanites (3:7, 12).

It wasn't that they intended to forget the Lord; rather, they lived among the Canaanites, and so they were under pressure from Canaanite religion and Canaanite customs, for these were appealing; they offered prosperity without purity, prosperity by promiscuity. Canaanite gods (it was said) were stimulated to give fertility on the farm by ritual prostitution in the temples; sex and wealth—very tempting!

In fact, 'forgot the Lord' doesn't mean that they literally 'forgot' him, for we know they continued to name him and to profess to worship him (e.g. Jdgs 17:1-3); they just 'forgot' him; they didn't trust him to provide for their needs, or give him his rightful place as the only God, or worship him alone, as he commanded, but also worshipped the Canaanite gods—in the Lord's sight, not to worship him at all!

Our situation is very much like that of Israel in the times of the judges; we live among people who spiritually speaking are Canaanites; people who worship the

gods of this world—the gods of wealth, success, popularity and sex—and it’s all too easy for us to ‘forget’ the Lord, and to adopt these gods and this lifestyle; we worship the Lord on Sunday, but the gods of his world Monday through Saturday!

2. A gracious God

Such gods, such a lifestyle, will inevitably bring trouble upon the Lord’s people, for he is both gracious and faithful to his purposes. When the people of Israel would not serve him, he gave them to serve their enemies—Cushan-rishathaim (8 years) and Eglon, king of Moab (18 years).

We call these periods of slavery judgments—but they were gracious judgments, because they were not to destroy, but to bring repentance and reformation; they were acts of grace, for otherwise they would have merged with the Canaanites. While not every trouble that comes upon us is such a judgment, when in trouble we ought to consider whether God might be disciplining us (Heb 12:6, 10b).

The grace of God is also seen in his saving them from these judgments, not once, but again and again (vs. 9, 15). Many people find Judges embarrassing, with heroes like Ehud, apparently vengeful and hateful and deceitful, killing Eglon under the pretence of giving him a message from God. But the scripture presents the judges as ‘saviours’ (vs. 9, 15, 31), equipped by the Spirit of the Lord for saving (3:10).

It is true that the scripture doesn’t say that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Ehud or Shamgar, but I believe that what was true of Othniel was true of all the judges; Shamgar killed 600 Philistine with an ox-goad (a 1.8m long piece of wood with metal point one end and shovel the other); surely only Spirit (like Samson) could have made it possible for him to kill so many in this way.

As the Spirit was upon Othniel, so he was upon all the judges (6:4; 11:29; 13:9; 14:6, 19; 15:14). And what was true of them was also true of the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ; he was filled with the Holy Spirit to equip him to save his people from their sins; by him he defeated the devil and offered himself to God (Heb 9:14). We too must have the Spirit to serve (Acts 1:8; Lk 11:13).

God saves his people by human agents; we are told little about Shamar, a more about Othniel, while Ehud’s story is told in great detail. Why? Partly because it is a great story! He was a great patriot, clever, brave, a real comic—a message from God indeed! And the Lord blessed him and protected him, so that he made good his escape, to led his people to victory over the Moabites and 80 years rest.

Ehud is the ‘typical’ judge—typical of *the* Judge, our Lord Jesus Christ, who alone defeated our great Eglon, the prince of this world who held us captive; sin had brought us into hopeless slavery; God raised him up as the Saviour, to save every one who believes in him (Heb 2:14-15). Having won the victory, Jesus calls us to follow him to victory; he leads those who follow him to sure and certain victory because unlike Ehud, he lives, never to die (Rom 6:9; Heb 7:25); let us follow him!

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My Notes:

Questions for Reflection:

1. Compare and contrast the accounts in Judges 3 of Othniel and Ehud; in what ways are they similar, and in what ways are they different? What do you notice about 1. The length the servitudes, the roles of the respective judges, the length of the years of rest; how may these be accounted for?
2. Many Christians are embarrassed by Ehud, and many non-Christians are very critical of him, for, as one writer puts it, ‘because he didn’t fight by the Marquis of Queensberry’s rules’! How do you think the historian felt about it, and why? And why should his opinion matter more than other opinions?
3. Is deceiving others or lying ever the right thing to do? (cf. Exodus 1:19-20; Joshua 2:1-7, with Hebrews 11:31, James 2:25). If so, when and why?
4. Judges is part of a book about God and salvation; in this book salvation is always by grace, and never by works; how is God’s grace revealed in the accounts of Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar?
5. Why is so much space given to the account of Ehud’s salvation work compared to the space given to Othniel, and why is this surprising?