

JUDGES 3:1-11
CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to Judges chapter 3 as we continue our study through this book. And, as you have seen, it is a dark period of time for the children of Israel as they allow peace and prosperity to get them to become complacent in their relationship with the Lord.

That complacency leads them into sin, into idolatry, away from the Lord.

And the Lord brings them into bondage to their enemies.

Then, after a period of time they repent of their sin, they cry out to God and God sends them a deliverer to set them free from the bondage that they were in.

And then the cycle repeats itself over and over again. It is a cycle of sin, servitude, supplication and salvation and we will see that in our study this morning as God raises up the first Judge in Israel, Othniel.

I have called this study – ***CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?***

And the reason for that is because we see God calling out to Israel over and over again for them to return to Him, not to worship the gods of the pagan nations around them.

And I think that same call of God is being spoken today. God is calling out to His people to follow Him, not allow the world into their lives or into the church.

And, as we will see, as we let the world into our lives and into the church, there are devastating consequences that will happen. That is the warning to the children of Israel, and it is a warning to us!

Let me share these words with you that will show you what is happening in the church today. We are told,

. . . There are pastors drawing 20,000 to arena-like settings each week and who have millions of people following them on social media. In the political arena, evangelicals are seen as a powerful voting bloc.

In reality, however, the world has had far more influence on the church than vice versa – because today’s evangelical churches enthusiastically borrow fads and absorb opinions from popular culture. That has rendered our collective testimony to the world almost totally ineffectual.

Incredibly, many evangelical leaders insist that what’s needed is even more of the same. One popular book for pastors even suggests that in the current political climate, the worst possible way to start a sermon is by telling people to open their Bibles.

Some Christians today act as if they are embarrassed by the Bible. The lead pastor in one of the largest churches in America recently suggested that Christians should stop saying, “The Bible says . . .” After all, he said, it’s an ancient text and most people today don’t take it seriously. He insists that pointing people to the Bible only makes our message sound less persuasive, hopelessly irrelevant.

That is diabolical nonsense. The Bible itself is eternally applicable, and it is infinitely more germane to the issues of life and godliness than topical humor, pop-culture references, literary analyses, viral videos or any of the other gimmicks people nowadays tend to think of as necessary tools of spiritual “relevance.”

More to the point, the idea that churches are giving their people too much Scripture is the very height of absurdity. Christians today are Biblically malnourished – severely so. A dearth [shortage] of Biblical preaching is the No. 1 reason the evangelical movement is so spiritually anemic. . . .

Paul might well have been speaking of our generation. Preaching is on the decline in a major way. Numerous churches – including several of the largest, most heavily marketed evangelical congregations – have relegated the pulpit ministry to second-class status.

Where preaching is still featured, it is short and superficial – and rarely Biblical. The trend is toward topical messages focused on timely issues, human relationships, success and self-help, recovery from addictions or even more lightweight themes – TED talks for the saints. [TED is a nonprofit devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks (18 minutes or less)] The preaching of God’s Word has never been more out of style. . . .

Notice the progression. First, Paul said a time was coming when people would depart from the faith. Then he warned Timothy that dangerous times were coming for the church. Here he suggests that as time would come when even people in the church would not endure sound doctrine but would desire instead to have their ears tickled.

In such a time, clear Biblical preaching is only more vital. When intolerance of the truth is heightened, the need for preachers to open the Bible and declare its truths boldly is greater than ever. Churches that tone down the message to accommodate the spirit of the age are playing into the enemy’s scheme. . . .

So the duty of every church leader today is clear. Our calling is not to lead self-help seminars or be motivational speakers. Our most important responsibility is to proclaim the Word of God.

Of course, that is every Christian's duty as well – not just pastors and church leaders. Christ's Great Commission is a mandate for making disciples, and Scripture is the necessary tool for fulfilling that task. So every Christian, in whatever sphere of influence God has placed us, has a mandate from Christ Himself to proclaim God's Word to a world starving to hear its truth.

- Decision, October 2019, pp.18-20

Now some of you may be wondering why this is so important and how I got that out of the text we will be looking at this morning.

First of all, every false doctrine that has come into the church is a result of a departure and a deviation from the truths of God found in the Word of God!

And I am not stretching that or trying to make it fit. These cults, these false religious systems are all born out of twisting or adding to or taking away from the Word of God!

And, because so many Christians do not know what their Bibles are telling them, what God's Word has to say, they fall prey to these false teachings and these false teachers.

And allowing sin into our lives, allowing idolatry into our lives, is a result of moving away from God and thus, moving away from His Word.

Remember what we are told in John chapter 8, **“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’ . . . Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”** John 8:31-32, 36.

Here is the key for all of us. Jesus is telling us that we ***MUST*** abide in His Word! What does that mean? It means we must obey what the Lord is telling us.

Think about that for a minute. If you say you are a disciple of Christ and yet, what you do contradicts what His Word is telling you, then something is seriously wrong!

And as free as we think we are, doing what we feel is right instead of what God's Word is telling us, we are not free. We are in bondage.

But as we apply the truths of God found in the Word of God to our lives, we are **FREE**
INDEED!

I have broken these verses we will be looking at this morning into three main points and they are as follows:

GOD'S MERCY – JUDGES 3:1-4

GOD'S ANGER – JUDGES 3:5-8

GOD'S SALVATION – JUDGES 3:9-11

So, with the remainder of our time this morning we are going to look at this topic, ***CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?*** And we will see what the Lord has for us as He shows us what He desires and yet, the wrong choices we can make that places us in bondage!

With that as our introduction, let's begin reading in Judges chapter 3, beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study through His Word.

JUDGES 3**VERSES 1-4**

Now as you read that it seems that God left these nations in the land, and in a minute we will talk about why He allowed that.

But my question is this. “Did the children of Israel not drive out the enemy from before them, leaving these pockets of resistance in the land or did God leave these enemies in the land? It seems like we see both points spoken of here in Judges!”

The answer to that questions is really pretty simple, **“YES!”**

What do I mean by that?

I mean that yes, the children of Israel did not destroy the enemy, drive them out of the land that God had given to the children of Israel, leaving pockets of resistance in the land.

This is pretty easy to see here in Judges. Look at Judges 1:21, **“But the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem; so the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day. . . . However, Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; for the Canaanites were determined to dwell in that land. And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites under tribute, but did not completely drive them out. Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer; so the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them. Nor did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron or the inhabitants of Nahalol; so the Canaanites dwelt among them, and were put under tribute. Nor did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Acco or the**

inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik, or Rehob. So the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out. Nor did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh or the inhabitants of Beth Anath; but they dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land. Nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath were put under tribute to them.” Judges 1:21, 27-33.

So the children of Israel clearly did not drive out the enemy that was living in the land of Canaan, the Promise land. The Scriptures are very clear on that.

But then we are also told here in Judges chapter 3 that God left them in the land to test the children of Israel.

How can it be both?

God left these Canaanite nations behind because Israel was not faithful in driving them out.

Thus, God was going to use them to test the children of Israel.

The perfect will of God for them was to drive out the enemy.

The permissive will of God was that even though the children of Israel did not obey the Lord completely, He was going to use these nations to test their faith!

As you look at the Scriptures you will see that there are four basic reason that God left the enemy in the land.

We see that in Deuteronomy 7:20-24 the reason is so that the land would not become a wilderness if they were driven out too quickly.

We are told in Deuteronomy 7, **“Moreover the Lord your God will send the hornet among them until those who are left, who hide themselves from you, are destroyed. You shall not be terrified of them; for the Lord your God, the great and awesome God, is among you. And the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you little by little; you will be unable to destroy them at once, lest the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. But the Lord your God will deliver them over to you, and will inflict defeat upon them until they are destroyed. And He will deliver their kings into your hand, and you will destroy their name from under heaven; no one shall be able to stand against you until you have destroyed them.”** Deuteronomy 7:20-24.

But that is not the case here.

Secondly, in Judges 2:20-21 we see the reason is to punish Israel for their apostasy, and that does apply here. We are told, **“Then the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel; and He said, ‘Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died.’”**

The third reason found in Judges 2:22-23 and Judges 3:4 was to test Israel to see if they would be faithful to Him, and they failed here.

These verses tell us that these things came upon them, **“so that through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the Lord, to walk in them as their fathers kept them, or not.’ Therefore the Lord left those nations, without driving them out immediately; nor did He deliver them into the hand of Joshua. . . . 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.”**

And the fourth reason is found in Judges 3:1-2 and that is to give this generation an experience in how to fight against the enemy, testing their faith in the Lord and not their might, and again, they are failing here. These verses tell us, **“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).”**

Now here’s the thing. God had every right to just destroy them for their rebellion against Him. For allowing idolatry into their lives. From turning their back on the Lord. They committed spiritual fornication as they were to be married to the Lord and they were involved with these pagan gods!

And instead of destroying them, we see our first point as we see ***GOD’S MERCY!***

As we have seen, instead of destroying the enemy, they let them live in the land of Canaan, kind of a good neighbor policy, but in the end, instead of bringing these Gentile nations to God, these Gentile nations brought the children of Israel to the many gods they were worshiping!

Here is what I find interesting about all of this.

They could have justified their actions very easily.

“Hey, yes we did not destroy them, but now they are working for us. They are paying us tribute. This is the best of both worlds!”

And the reality was, it was not the best of both worlds because you cannot live in the will of God and go after the passions of this world at the same time! It does not work and most of the time, we are drawn into the ways of the world instead of bringing the people of this world to Christ!

Listen to what Peter wrote in I Peter 5:8, **“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”**

Peter is telling us that we are not to allow the world to come into our lives because in the end, it will hurt us.

You see, when Peter speaks of us being sober, he is speaking of balancing your life, not being taken in by intoxicating influences of the world.

We need to be vigilant or to be watchful, to stay awake, to pay attention.

But why do we need to do these things?

Because the Devil is stalking us as a lion would his prey, he is going to and fro seeking whom he may devour!

And look at the battles the children of Israel would have to encounter, these enemies who were left in the land of Canaan! These wars, these battles were going to be a test of their faith and many wonder how they would handle it and for that matter, how should we handle these battles we face on daily basis?

We don't have to guess because Peter goes on to tell us as he wrote, **“Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.”** I Peter 5:9.

Notice that we don't fight the Devil, we resist him in the faith, being steadfast in what we believe, and I guess in our day, I need to be clearer on that.

We need to be steadfast in the faith that has been entrusted to us by God, according to His Word and not outside of His Word. It is not about how I feel, it is about what God has said!

And here is something that we need to keep in mind.

Satan is the father of lies, it is his natural language, he is a deceiver, and thus, the only way to withstand him is in the faith, by the power of God's Word, the truth!

Paul, in II Corinthians 10:3-5 tells us, **“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”**

You see, it is not a physical battle but a spiritual battle we face, and Satan brings forth his anti-biblical ideas that are mixed with some truth, but they still are deadly, they are there to destroy us!

Thus, put on the mind of Christ; know the Word of God and you won't fall prey to the garbage that he is putting forth!

But, because many in the church today have not done that, we see New Age teachings coming into the church. We see Eastern Mysticism come into the church. We have churches that are using “Christian Tarot cards” and there is no such thing. We have Christian witches and yoga and all kinds of garbage that God speaks against, coming into the church and the church is silent about these things, at least many are!

Let me share this with you and you will see what I mean. We are told,

For the last 2,000 years, the church has been plagued with heresy after heresy seeking to tame the gospel, and today is no different. Here are just a few of the popular beliefs in our current culture that threaten to infiltrate the church:

Universalism: the belief that all people will be saved or that all ways lead to God and eternal life. Many who subscribe to this theology claim that, for instance, Christians and Muslims worship the same God.

The Prosperity Gospel: the belief that God's primary concern is for believers to be healthy and wealthy. If Christians are sick, suffering or poor, it is because of sin or a lack of faith.

The New Age Movement: a belief system of Eastern influence that emphasizes universal tolerance and doing what feels good (moral relativism). It contends that man is divine and can create his own reality and identity.

Legalism: the improper use of the law described in Scripture to try to attain or maintain salvation. Legalism also fosters judgment of fellow Christians for not adhering to one's own ideas of holiness rather than encouraging them to imitate Christ, obeying God's standards as explicitly outlined in Scripture.

Hyper-grace: the overreaction to legalism, resulting in abuse of God's grace. Believers find themselves drawn to the modern hyper-grace movement because they are looking for freedom not just from legalism, but also from God's standards.

The Emerging Church: a movement that claims to be Christian but employs culturally sensitive methods to make the gospel more palatable to a postmodern culture. Jesus' life is treated more as an allegory or narrative rather than a true event. Of particular concern is the inclusive approach to various belief systems, an emphasis on emotions over absolute truth and the notion that there is no hell, judgment or need for forgiveness. The Emerging Church movement also glorifies honesty and confession, but without repentance.

Behind all these false ideologies is the belief that Scripture is not infallible and truth simply changes with the times. A 2014 Gallup poll revealed that:

- 22 percent of Americans believe the Bible is the actual Word of God and should be taken literally
- 28 percent believe it is the actual Word of God, but with multiple possible interpretations
- 28 percent believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God but should not be taken literally
- 18 percent believe it is an ancient book of legends, history and moral precepts written by man

How do we respond to such false teachings as they arise within the church? We preach Christ. We reinforce biblical doctrine, clinging to the highest authority - the Word of God. For “The god of this world has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord” (2 Cor. 4:4-5a). . . .

So we can say:

To the universalists: No one will be saved apart from Jesus Christ. Only those who choose to repent and call on the name of Jesus will have eternal life (see Acts 4:12, Matt. 25:46, Heb. 9:27, John 14:6).

To heralds of the prosperity gospel: Jesus promised us that we will suffer, but that He is with us and has overcome the world (see John 16:33, Rom. 5:3-5, 2 Tim. 3:12, Luke 14:27).

To the new agers: There is only one sovereign God, Creator of all things (see Is. 55:8-9, Job 12:10, Heb. 2:5-10).

To legalists: If righteousness were attainable through the law, Christ would not have had to die (see Matt. 7:22-23; Gal.2:21; Rom. 3:10-12, 28; James 2:10). We are justified by faith in Jesus Christ’s singular work on the cross, and even this faith is a gift from God not achieved by our own efforts (see Rom. 4:5, Eph. 2:8). And we are not to judge our brothers and sisters in Christ on debatable issues (see Rom. 14:1-12).

To proponents of hyper-grace: God’s grace has freed us from the bondage of sin, but we should not receive His sacrifice in vain (see Rom. 6:23, Heb. 10:26-29). We must repent and seek to live under the lordship of Christ, seeking holiness through the power of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Pet. 1:13-16, 2:11-12, 16; Rom. 5:20-6:18).

To the emerging church: If we dilute the gospel, then we no longer have Good News to share (see Gal. 1:8-9, 1 Cor. 15:1-4, Ex. 20:3-6, John 8:24). Only Christ can break the chains of sin, set the captives free and conform us to His image (see 1 John 5:3-5, Phil. 3:7-9, Gal. 5:16).

- <http://bit.ly/2rvLqYr>

Again, how do we withstand the onslaught of the enemy against us? Peter told us,

“Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.” I Peter 5:9.

Now, God does not force us to obey His Words to us. He does not make us do anything, we have a free will to choose to obey or not obey what He has told us.

And that is the next point, ***GOD'S ANGER*** when we do not obey His voice, we do not listen to Him. It is not that we cannot hear Him, we chose not to.

VERSES 5-8

Remember that God left these six nations within the land of Israel, the Promise Land.

And what we see here is that these nations were a snare unto the nation of Israel.

And notice how innocent this all starts out.

We are told, "**So the children of Israel dwelt among them . . .**" No big deal, they were dwelling among these pagan nations. But what always starts out as small, ends up getting bigger and bigger and more dangerous to our lives, especially our spiritual lives!

As we see Israel living among the enemy, we see what comes next, and it is never good when we don't obey the Lord.

We are told that "**. . . they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons; and they served their gods.**"

Do you see how far they fell from God!

They were intermarrying with the enemy. And the next step is that they began to serve these god's that these other nations served.

And, like I have said, this is the progression folk's; a little compromise goes a long way. And Joshua warned them of this relationship with the enemy, that it would be a disaster for them.

Remember what He told them. He said to them back in Joshua 23, “**. . . If indeed you do go back, and cling to the remnant of these nations - these that remain among you - and make marriages with them, and go into them and they to you, know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the LORD your God has given you.**” Joshua 23:12-13.

God warned them and thus, the very thing God told them not to do, they did!

And the problem was that God’s law ran contrary to their fleshly desires.

You see, when they sinned, they needed to offer an animal sacrifice. It was a tough walk, a narrow road, when compared to the worship of these pagan gods.

God asked His people for a life of self-denial, but in the worship of these pagan gods they were trying to satisfy self, to feed the flesh.

Thus, Israel chose the temporary pleasures of this world instead of the eternal treasures and they paid the consequences for their actions.

It is as Proverbs 4:23 warns us, “**Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.**”

And the Amplified Bible puts this verse like this, “**Keep and guard your heart with all vigilance and above all that you guard, for out of it flow the springs of life.**”

May we do that, guard our hearts from the things of this world and fill it with the things of God!

And notice what we see here. We are told that they did evil in the sight of God, and “**They forgot the LORD their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs.**” And the result of that was that “**. . . the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel.**”

I want you to see the cause and effect in what is going on here.

They turned from the Lord, they served the false gods of the pagan nations that were living among them, that is the cause!

And then the Lord was angry with them, the effect!

And for this group of Jews, they went into captivity, the King of Mesopotamia took them into bondage for eight years! Again, bondage is the effect of our disobedience to the Lord and that bondage can be seen in many different ways, but it is still bondage and the Lord will leave us there until we are ready to cry out and repent and return to Him!

And I love how this plays out here because the Lord is trying to drive home this powerful point.

They are in bondage to the King of Mesopotamia for eight years and this Kings name is Cushan-Rishathaim.

That is fascinating to me because that name speaks of where they were at.

You see, because they refused to serve the true and living God who wanted to bless them and had blessed them, that all-sufficient One, God gave them over to Cushan-Rishathaim or to “double-wickedness,” which his name means!

Now let me also say this. God’s anger against us doesn’t result in retaliation or wrath but He will chasten us because we are His children.

I think we need to understand that.

When parents discipline their children, it is not to hurt them, but to help them understand right from wrong. And when they do wrong, there are consequences for their actions, and that same is true for us.

God's chastening is because we are His children and He loves us so much that He does not want to leave us where we are at, but He wants to draw us out of that dangerous path we are on and to get us to follow Him, the Good Shepherd!

Let me show you what I mean in regard to what love does. We are told,

A Norfolk-Southern train was rolling down the rails of Indiana at 24 miles per hour. Suddenly the conductor, Robert Mohr, spotted an object on the tracks roughly a city block away.

Initially the engineer, Rod Lindley, thought it was a dog on the tracks. Then Mohr screamed, "That's a baby!"

The baby was 19-month-old Emily Marshall, who had wandered away from home while her mother planted flowers in her yard.

Lindley hit the brakes. Mohr bolted out the door and raced along a ledge to the front of the engine. He realized there was no time to jump ahead of the train and grab the baby. So he ran down a set of steps, squatted at the bottom of the grill, and hung on.

As the train drew close to Emily, she rolled off the rail onto the roadbed, but she was still in danger of being hit by the train. So Mohr stretched out his leg and pushed her out of harm's way.

Mohr then jumped off the train, picked up the little girl, and cradled her in his arms. Little Emily ended up with just a cut on her head and a swollen lip.

Sometimes, like this train conductor, God must hurt us in order to save us.

- Perfect Illustrations for Every Topic and Occasion

Paul put it like this in Hebrews 12:5-11, **“And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord , Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.’ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”**

Once again we see that God chastens us, disciplines us because we are His children, adopted into the family of God through Jesus Christ!

And Paul tells us not to despise or be discouraged by this chastening, because it shows you how much God loves you. If He didn’t love you, He wouldn’t care what you do, but He does love you and is training you up, helping you to grow in the Lord!

And we may not like the chastening that we receive while we are in the middle of it, but if we look back and see what God was doing, if we were honest with ourselves, we would see that God did exactly what He needed to do to get us back on track! Again, that is how much He loves us!

On the other end of the spectrum, Satan doesn't care what you do, as long as you are not drawing close to God, as long as you are not reading the Bible, as long as you are not sharing the love of Christ with a lost and dying world. Thus, do what you want and that just shows how much Satan doesn't love people and yet, they follow his leading so often. Be careful!

Let me sum this up like this,

God had put a wall between Israel and her neighbors, not because Israel was better than any other nation, but because she was different. Instead of worshiping idols, the Jews worshipped the one true God who made the heavens and the earth. Humans did not devise the laws and covenants of Israel; God did. Israel alone had the true sanctuary where God dwelt in His glory; it was the true priesthood, ordained by God; and it had the true altar and sacrifices that God would respect (Rom. 9:4-5). Only through Israel would all the nations of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3).

When Israel obeyed the Lord, He blessed them richly, and both their conduct and God's blessing were a testimony for their unbelieving neighbors. (See Gen. 23:6; 26:26-33; 30:27; 39:5.) The pagan people would say, "These Jews are different. The God they worship and serve is a great God!" And the Jewish people would then have had opportunities to tell their neighbors how to trust Jehovah and receive His forgiveness and blessing. (See Deut. 4:1-13).

Alas, instead of trusting God to change their neighbors, the gods of their neighbors changed the Jews, and everything Moses warned them not to do, they did. The Jews broke down the wall of separation between themselves and their godless neighbors, and the results were tragic.

Contrary to God's law, Jewish men married pagan wives, and Jewish women married pagan husbands (Gen. 24:3; 26:34-35; 27:46; Ex. 34:15-16; Deut. 7:3-4; Josh. 23:12).

The idolaters gradually stole the hearts of their mates from worshipping Jehovah to worshipping false gods. . . .

Is it any wonder that God became angry? Is it any wonder He humiliated Israel by using pagan nations to discipline His own people? Since Israel was acting like the pagans, God had to treat them like pagans! . . .

Charles Spurgeon said that God never allows His people to sin successfully. Their sin will either destroy them or it will invite the chastening hand of God. If the history of Israel teaches the contemporary church anything it's the obvious lesson that "righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people" (Prov. 14:34 NIV).

- Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary*, p. 433

How true that is, and it is an important lesson for us to learn so we don't go down that same path as the children of Israel did!

As we read on, we will now start the period of the Judges, the deliverers!

As I have said in a previous study, some say that there are only 12 Judges while others say that there are 13, why is that?

First of all, Deborah and Barak are considered one since Deborah was really the deliverer.

The reason some say there are only 12 is they leave out the son of Gideon, Abimelech because he kind of got the position because he was the son of Gideon and he really wasn't very good.

But I believe he is listed, even though he was not good.

Samson for the most part was not very good.

So look at what we have seen so far.

We have seen that the children of Israel had a time of peace and prosperity.

Which lead them into a period of sinfulness as they turned from the Lord and worshiped the gods of the people of Canaan.

From here we see them in servitude as they are in bondage to the enemy, taken into captivity.

And next, we will see the salvation that God will bring to them as they cry out to God in repentance, after some eight years of captivity, and God will deliver them from this bondage that they are in!

VERSES 9-11

Yes, Mesopotamia was hundreds of miles away from where Othniel and his people lived but that didn't stop them from coming down and oppressing the children of Israel. And after eight years of bondage the children of Israel cried out to God and God raised up a deliverer. Now I don't believe they were truly sincere because, as we will see, when Othniel dies, they go back to their wicked ways.

What I want you to understand is that when we cry out to God, when we repent of our sins, He is ready to restore us back into that fellowship that we once had but sin had destroyed.

God not only brings to us the ultimate salvation when we repent of our sins and ask Jesus to be Lord and Savior of our lives, but He also brings salvation to the situations that we face each and every day!

Yes, God will test our faith, but don't be like the children of Israel who were testing the patience and longsuffering of God by their sinful ways.

Now look at what we are told of this man named Othniel.

We are told that “**The Spirit of the LORD came upon**” Othniel.

In other words, he was empowered by the Spirit of God for the work he was to do.

I think that God can also use us to be a Judge in a sense, a deliverer in regard to the situations that people find themselves in.

We can help to point them to the One who can deliver them. But to be able to do that we too must be empowered by the Spirit of God. Make no mistake about it, if we want to be fruitful in the work that God has called us to do, we must be empowered by His Spirit!

It is as we are told in Zechariah 4:6, “**... This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ Says the Lord of hosts.**”

And that is what Jesus tells us in Acts 1:8, “**But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**”

We need that power in our lives!

It is as T. J. Bach said, “The Holy Spirit longs to reveal to you the deeper things of God. He longs to love through you. He longs to work through you. Through the blessed Holy Spirit you may have: strength for every duty, wisdom for every problem, comfort in every sorrow, joy in His overflowing service.”

I don’t know if you have seen this, I hope you have because it is very apparent, but morality is on a decline in America! I know, I am preaching to the choir, but it seems to be getting worse and worse as time goes by!

Let me show you what I mean. We are told, and I am only going to share a few of these points. There are 100 of them but as you look at them you can see how far we have fallen and the reason for the fall is simple. We have moved away from the Lord, we have moved away from His Word and we are doing what we want instead of following Him!

Listen to these points, they go like this,

#1 Approximately one-third of the entire population of the United States (110 million people) currently has a sexually transmitted disease according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

#2 Every single year, there are 20 million new STD cases in America.

#3 America has the highest STD infection rate in the entire industrialized world.

#4 Americans in the 15 to 24-year-old age group account for about 50 percent of all new STD cases each year.

#27 America has the highest divorce rate in the world by a good margin.

#31 For women under the age of 30 in the United States, more than half of all babies are being born out of wedlock.

#32 At this point, approximately one out of every three children in the United States lives in a home without a father.

#41 Most women that get abortions in the United States claim to be Christian. Protestant women get 42 percent of all abortions and Catholic women get 27 percent of all abortions.

#45 A Department of Homeland Security report that was released in January 2012 says that if you are “anti-abortion”, you are a potential terrorist.

#53 An all-time high 59 percent of all Americans believe that the traditional definition of marriage needs to be changed.

- <http://bit.ly/2rz8c1z>

Again, that is just a brief sampling and the problem is that Christians are losing the battle here as they are embracing immorality like the unsaved!

Now please hear me out on this. I am not trying to offend anyone, but it is what it is. I don't support Democrats or Republicans; I support the best person for the job! The problem today, as you look at the Democratic candidates for Presidency, not one of them is pro-life, and they are for the homosexual, transgender lifestyle as well as socialism. Every one of them! So how can a Christian vote for any of them, and yet they do, and they get mad at me when I say things like this. They get mad at you when you stand up for the things of God! And yet, they call themselves Christians. I don't get it!

But here is a bigger issue, what would God say if you support those who support abortion, homosexuality, and-so-on? I think it is pretty simple. It is as Paul said in Romans chapter 1, you don't have to be doing these things but if you support those who do, you are just as guilty!

That is the point here in Judges. The Jews became like the pagan nations around them, there was no difference. They were guilty before God!

And look at the bondage so many Christians are in. The only solution is to repent and return to the Lord and receive the Salvation that He will bring to the situations you are in!

And as Christians humble themselves and pray, seek the Lord and repent of their sins, forgiveness for this nation may come from the Lord!

But it is God's people that need to do this and be a light to a lost and dying world, pointing them to Jesus!

As one writer put it,

Othniel not only rescued his nation from bondage, but also served his people as judge for forty years. This meant that he exercised authority in managing the affairs of the nation, and it was his spiritual and civil leadership that brought rest to the land. Never underestimate the good that one person can do who is filled with the Spirit of God and obedient to the will of God.

- Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary*, p. 434

Remember what I have called this message, "***Can You Hear Me Now?***"

And, agree with it or not, I think God is calling out to us today, drawing us close to Him and we have a choice to make.

We can listen and obey what He is telling us. Or, we can do as we want, and I am sure we can justify our actions, we are good at that.

But did God let the children of Israel get away with their spiritual fornication?

Absolutely not. And the reason He didn't, like I have said, is that He loved them too much to leave them where they were at. He was trying to get them back on track and I think He does the same with us!

With this being the first Sunday of the year, I am going to challenge you to read through the Bible in this coming year.

We have been doing that since I came up here. We are on our twenty-fifty time through as a body of believers.

And we try to make it easy for you. In the bulletins each week, you will find the chapters you need to read in the Old and New Testaments.

Also, we have them on our web page so you can just click and find out what chapters you need to read in both the Old and New Testaments.

If you want to be set free from the lies that are out there. If you want to know the truths of God found in the Word of God, then you have to read it!

I don't want this to be some legalistic obligation for you. But, I pray that you have a desire to know God even more in this coming year and to know Him more you will have to read His Word, pray for the Holy Spirit to open it up to your heart and to your life, and then apply these truths of God found in the Word of God to your life!

The Lord is calling out to us, ***“Can You Hear Me Now?”***