

Othniel: A Time of Testing

The book of Judges begins right after the death of Joshua. After wandering in the wilderness for 40 years, Israel has finally moved into the Promised Land. They've defeated several Kings and the 12 tribes have each been given a portion of the land to call their new home.

This book is full of action and adventure. It's a book full of unlikely heroes. It's a book where the villains are really violent, and many of the heroes are far from perfect. And it's a book that illustrates the amazing grace of God toward his people.

Over and over in this book, you see a repetitive Cycle of Sin. Again and again you see the sad and monotonous cycle of Sin – Slavery – Sorrow – and Salvation. Even the amazing Victories are local and short-lived --- and every time the people return to sin which plunges them into another period of slavery to yet another enemy.

Each time His people cry out to Him for help, God raises up a hero to rescue the people from oppression. You've probably heard of some of them, like Sampson, and Gideon, and Deborah. But how many of you have heard about Othniel?

Othniel was the nephew of Caleb. Caleb and Joshua together were the ones who led the Israelites into the Promised Land. And Othniel lived up to his uncle's example. We first hear about Othniel in Judges chapter one when he defeated a ruler in Negeb and moved into that region. Othniel settled in the land of the Negeb (south of Judah) and he and his family farmed the land in peace for several years. The battles were over and life was good ... but then the people took their first turn on the Sin Cycle.

As I said last week, we find this cycle of departure from God into sin repeated over and over in the Book of Judges. The people of God would forsake the Lord their God, do evil by serving other Gods, God would send other nations to oppress them, as they suffered they cried out to God, God would have mercy on His people by raising up a judge to deliver them, then they would have peace for a while.

1. Sin
2. Suffering and Slavery
3. Sorrow and Supplication
4. Salvation

Let me remind you, as I did last week, that the way God dealt with Israel is similar to the way He deals with the children of God even in this age of Grace. Disobedience leads to God's discipline. God disciplines His children so they will turn back to Him in repentance. God delivers His people from their sins.

When believers depart from the Lord – when we are a disobedient, God will discipline us for our own good. He will take us to His woodshed.

In fact, God knows us so well, and loves us so much, that He purposely allows difficulties and testings in our lives to prove His love and approve our faith. In the time of the Judges we find this is true. Because Israel refused to walk with the Lord like He commanded them to, He refused to drive out all their enemies in the land of Canaan. Thus, Israel was forced to live alongside the very people they had been sent to destroy.

Why did God leave enemies in the land?

We are told in verses 1-5 exactly why God left the people in the land. Listen for God's reasons for leaving the enemies in the land:

1 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

2 (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),

3 namely, five lords of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites who dwelt in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal Hermon to the entrance of Hamath.

4 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.

5 Thus the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

1. He left them there to prove Israel (v. 1, 4) – The word “prove” means “to put to the test”. God allowed the pagans to live around His people to test Israel.

God tested His people to see how they would live when surrounded by the wicked. God desired for His people to live holy, separated lives. He desired for them to keep His commandments. Verse 4 says God left the pagan enemies there to test Israel whether they would obey the commandments of the Lord. They failed this test!

2. He left them there to teach new generations about spiritual warfare (v. 2). God wanted them to learn the lessons of battle their fathers had known. God wanted them to be strong and to know how to fight the enemy when he came around. God wanted them to see that they needed to depend on Him to win their battles. They failed this test too!

It wasn't long until this caused some serious problems among the people of Israel. Israel proved that they could not be trusted to stand up against the enemy. They proved that they would rather join the enemy than fight them.

I. ISRAEL'S COMPROMISE v. 5-7

These verses give us the ugly details of Israel's first great failure. Notice how they compromised the Word of God and the will of God to do the things they wanted to do.

5 Thus the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

6 And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons; and they served their gods.

7 So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs.

A. Living With The Canaanites v. 5 – The Bible says that the children of Israel “dwelt among” the various tribes of Canaan. The word “dwelt” has the idea “of settling down; of setting up housekeeping”.

When Israel arrived in Canaan. They were commanded to destroy these people without mercy, now they are living among them. It took a very short time for their former enemies to become their friendly neighbors.

Here's the problem, Israel was to be separate from the world around them. They were unique among all the peoples of the world. They had been chosen, redeemed and set apart to serve the Lord God Almighty, and He expected them to remain separate. Because they didn't, they opened a floodgate of sin that would end with them facing the terrible chastisement of God.

Christians are to be a separate people as well, in 2 Cor. 6:17 Paul quotes the prophet Ezekiel saying, **"Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you."**" God loved us, He chose us, He send His Son to die for us; He redeemed us and bought us and we belong to Him.

When we are saved, we are called by God to live godly lives in an ungodly world. Like the Israelites, God leaves us in a world where there are temptations and trials and enemies. We live in the world that is under the rule of the evil one. But we are not to be of the world. Jesus prayed in John 17, **"I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world."**

When we get too close to the world open ourselves up to compromising with sin. It is a dangerous thing for a child of God to live like the world around him!

B. Intermarriage With The Canaanites v. 6a – After a while, the people of Israel got so used to living among the Canaanites that they began to intermarry with them. This was expressly forbidden by the Lord. It was pure disobedience on their part.

Maybe they said, "These Canaanites are not as bad as we were told. They are actually very nice people. They're not monsters at all. Their girls make good devoted wives. There is no reason why we can't marry them. After all, we might just be able to change them." Israel soon found out that it was them and not the Canaanites that changed.

As they married into the tribes around them, the Israelites began to lose their national identity. The very integrity of their families began to break down. They soon lost the very thing that made them unique.

The same danger confronts us today. When we get too close to the world around us, we will soon find ourselves entangled with them in their sins. The company you keep will determine how close you walk to the Lord, 1 Cor. 15:33.

We must interact with the world so that we can be a light to them and give them the Gospel, Matt. 5:16; Acts 1:8. But, we must be careful about who is influencing who. It is only a short step from walking with the world to living like the world.

C. Idolatry With The Canaanites v. 6b, 7b – it was a very short step from living among them, to marrying them to worshiping with them. You can imagine how they rationalized this. Perhaps they said, "Well, you marry a Canaanite girl and you just have to understand how they are. They were brought up differently than we were. You have to allow them to bring their gods. After all, it's just part of her culture."

So, these people, the children of Israel, who had been redeemed by the blood of the lamb, and who had been delivered from Egypt by God's mighty power, who had been the beneficiaries of God's power and work time and again, find themselves bowing before the idol God's of the Canaanites. Verse 7b says they **"served the Baals and Asherahs"**. This refers to the various gods and goddesses of the Canaanites.

What you have here is a group of people who have gone, in one generation, from worshiping God and fighting evil, to abandoning God while they sleep with the enemy! Worst of all, they took their precious sons and their precious daughters and handed them over to the very people they had been commanded to utterly destroy.

The same danger confronts wayward saints in our day! When we refuse to maintain our distance from the world around us; when we continually yoke ourselves to the people and things of the world; when we bow down at their altars, we are sacrificing a generation to the gods of this world. We are teaching our children that they are free to treat God and His Word as they please. We are telling them that it is alright to disregard God, His Word, His House, His worship and His will. We are telling that they are free to chart their own course through this world.

Each step they took led them farther away from God. Each step they took away from Him led them down a pathway toward totally abandoning Him and His ways. Verse 7a tells us that they **“forgot the Lord their God.”** The people of Israel reached a place where they simply ignored God and ceased to care about Him or what He had to say about anything. They reached a place of total indifference toward the Lord.

That is where Israel was spiritually, but that is not where God would leave them. Charles Spurgeon used to say, “God never allows His people to sin successfully.” That is, you might do it, but you won’t get away with it forever! There is always a price to pay for disobedience and rebellion against God.

So Israel’s Compromise lead to God’s Chastisement.

II. ISRAEL’S CHASTISEMENT (v. 8)

8 Therefore the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the children of Israel served Cushan-Rishathaim eight years.

A. The Focus Of God’s Anger – The word “anger” refers to “a flaring of the nostrils”. It is the image of face filled with wrath. The word “hot” means “to be furious”. God was not angry with the Canaanites.

Oh, He hated their sin, but they were lost people. They did not have His Law. They had not been redeemed and separated and commanded to be different. No, God was angry, but His anger was directed at His people. They were about to be punished for their sins against God.

If you are saved and you choose to walk away from the Lord, you might as well know that there will be a price to pay. God will bring His chastisement into your life, Rev. 3:19; Heb. 12:6-12. God does this, not to hurt us, but to help us to get back to where we are supposed to be, 1 Cor. 11:32.

B. The Fierceness Of God’s Discipline – We are told that God “sold” Israel into the hands of a pagan king. It has the idea of “giving up, or giving over into one’s control or power.” In other words, Israel gave themselves to paganism and God punished them by giving what they wanted. They did not want to follow His ruled in their lives, so He allowed them to be ruled by a harsh, pagan king. The name of this king is “Chushan-rishathaim”. This name means “Doubly Wicked Cushan”, literally “Doubly wicked blackness”. All this means is that Israel reaped what they had sowed. They wanted paganism. They wanted their sin, they wanted their false gods; and God gave them everything they asked for and more.

The same danger faces people in this room today. There are people sitting here today who are not as close to the Lord as they once were. You are not attending church like you used to. You are not as committed as you used to be. You are no longer faithful to the Lord like you once were. You just don't serve Him like you used to. Other things have taken His place in your life. Other gods if you will. Little things like your pleasure, your desires, your toys; you know what I am talking about.

Well. Don't be surprised when you reap what you have sowed. Those things that are so important to you can become tyrants in your life. They can become "doubly wicked and black" to you.

You might reap your harvest in the lives of your children, when they walk away from the Lord. You might reap your harvest in God selling you to the things you run after. But, you will reap your harvest!

The fact is, Spurgeon was right. "God never allows His people to sin successfully!" you will reap what you sow, Gal. 6:7-8. If you fear the crop you might reap, the time to change is now, before any more damage is done! Come home today!

God sold them into slavery and left them there for "eight years". He allowed them to experience the full measure of what their sin cost them. When they dwelt among the Canaanites, married their sons and daughters and bowed down to their gods, they never thought it would come to this, but it did! They paid a terrible price for their folly!

What kind of price will you pay for your sin? When you are sold under your sins, you lack the power to free yourself. You lack the power to help others around you. You lack the power to pray as you should. You lack the power to read and understand the Word of God as you could. You lack the power to be who God saved you to be. Someone said, "Sin will take you farther than you want to go; keep you longer than you want to stay; and cost you more than you want to pay." That's the truth, and if I were you, I would listen to what the Lord is saying to you today!

Israel's Compromise led to their Chastisement but the Lord sent

III. ISRAEL'S CHAMPION (v. 9-11)

9 When the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the children of Israel, who delivered them: Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.

10 The Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the Lord delivered Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-Rishathaim.

11 So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

When Israel came to themselves, they called on God and He heard them. When they turned back to Him, He reached out to them in deliverance. He raised up their first judge, a man by the name of Othniel! Othniel is called "a deliverer". The word means "a savior", and that's just what Othniel was.

A. Othniel's Credentials – We are told that Othniel is "**the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.**" Kenaz was probably Caleb's brother, and Othniel was probably his son. That would have made him Caleb's nephew.

Othniel was a man of courage and bravery. We already met Othniel in Judges 1:12-13. There Othniel defeated a Canaanite city to win Caleb's daughter, Ascah, as his wife.

So, Othniel was a man of great courage with strong ties to a former generation of leaders in Israel. He was battle tested. He was available and God chose him.

B. Othniel's Empowerment – Othniel was useful to the Lord because “**the Spirit of the Lord came upon him.**” Othniel did not possess the power to deliver Israel within himself. But, when the Spirit of God took control of his life, God was able to use him in great ways. Othniel did not really deliver Israel. God delivered Israel through Othniel!

The truth is, left to ourselves, we are incapable of serving God as He deserves to be served. The only way we will ever be useful to, and usable by, the Lord is when we are controlled by the Spirit of God like Othniel was, Gal. 5:16-25; Eph. 5:18.

The Spirit of God will enable us to stand against the enemies around us. The Spirit of God will make us powerful for the glory of the Lord. The Spirit of God will use us in ways that we can hardly imagine, but we must yield to Him and His power in and over our lives. That is the secret to power with God, Acts 1:8.

C. Othniel's Victory – God enabled Othniel to defeat old “Doubly wicked and black”. God empowered Othniel to judge the nation of Israel for the rest of his life, some 40 years. God gave Othniel victory in his life because Othniel gave himself to the Lord!

Do you want the Lord to use your life for His glory? Do you want to see Him do great things through you? Do you want to be free from the yoke of paganism? Do you want to see your family delivered from the bondage of sin and the world? Do you want victory in your life?

If you do, yield to the Lord like Othniel did. Allow the Lord to lead you and control you and He will use you for His glory.

I wonder, are you concerned about where you are spiritually with the Lord today. Are you concerned about where your family is headed? Are you concerned about some around you who have gone off in search of the things of this world? If any of these things are true, why don't you come before Him today and deal with these issues.

Would you like to be used of the Lord in a greater way? Would you like to be more dedicated to Him? Has God been dealing with you about your walk with Him? If so, you come to Him and get the help you need.

The story of Othniel is here to point us to the greater deliverer, Jesus Christ. Othniel was from the tribe of Judah. His name means “the lion of God” or “the power of God.” He defeated a great enemy, took His inheritance, and won a wife. The wife received springs of water. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Him. He went to battle. He defeated the doubly wicked blackness. He brought peace to God's people.

Does that sound like anyone you know? Jesus Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the power of God unto salvation. The Spirit of the Lord was upon Him. He defeated the enemy of our souls. He won the church as His bride. He gave us the Holy Spirit, like springs of water. He brought us peace with God.

Come to Him now.