

Othniel and Ehud

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Preacher: Mike Salvati

[0:00] You may be seated, kids, you're excused, to your King's Kids class, and if you'd open up your Bibles to Judges chapter 3. Judges comes after the first five books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and then Joshua, and then Judges.

If you've got a pew Bible, it's on page, I think it's 238. We're in Judges chapter 3.

Years ago, me and my family were at a friend's pool party, and they had this big above-ground pool, circular pool, and someone had the great idea, hey, let's drop in five adults and let's start walking in the same direction.

So 15, no, 15 adults, 15 adults were walking in circles clockwise in this pool, and within moments, do you know what we generated? A current.

And so if you were one of those styrofoam noodles, a ball, if you were one of those plastic tubes, if you were a small child, you get pulled into the current created by these adults.

[1:13] And if you were one of those adults, and you picked up your feet, you got pulled along in the current too. The world, biblically defined, is sinful, spiritually dead humanity, an organized rebellion against God.

And you know what the world creates? A current. The world creates currents of thinking. The world generates currents of value.

The world has currents of methods, of practices, of how-tos. And we can be swept up into these currents of the world.

Brothers and sisters, last week we introduced the book of Judges, and the book of Judges is God testing his people, Israel, again and again and again. And brothers and sisters, we are tempted.

We're in the world, but we're not to be of the world, and we're tempted by the world. Here's the question. Will we, brothers and sisters, be swept into the canonizing currents of contemporary culture?

[2:34] Or will we stand firm on the solid ground of Jesus Christ? The book of Judges is a tragic account of how the tribes of Israel, they failed God's test again and again and again.

And they were swept into apostasy by the currents of canonization. And so instead of dispossessing the nations of Canaan, Israel becomes more and more like the nations of Canaan. And there's this, there's this repeated refrain. We're going to see it. Israel did what was evil on the side of the Lord.

It's the majority, this gets repeated at the beginning of the book, and by the time you get to 17, it's the shift into canonization. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes.

Canaanized. The book of Judges helps us to see what happens when our God ceases to be the controlling center of our life.

[3:44] We drift into worldliness. So, the book of Judges, and we're going to see it this morning, warns us against worldliness, and it woos us to God's Savior and who he's raised up, and he's better than them all.

Jesus Christ. Again, if you're joining us for the first time, the book of Judges consists of 12 judges. Six minor judges, six major judges.

And this summer, we're looking at the six major judges. And this morning, we're looking at the first two. Othniel and Ehud. Othniel, the Eagle Scout.

Ehud, the assassin. And there's a pattern, a cycle in both of them. So, here's how we're going to proceed.

We're going to walk through the Othniel account. Look at this Eagle Scout. And then we're going to walk through the Ehud cycle. And we're going to see a lot of similar kind of characteristics, but there's a difference with this assassin.

[4:53] And then I'm going to answer the question, what does this mean for us today? So, let's look at Othniel, the Eagle Scout, and this pattern that gets established.

Let me read it. And it's Judges chapter 3, verses 7 through 11. Hear God's word. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord, their God, and served the Baals and the Ashereth.

Therefore, the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Cushion Rishatham, king of Mesopotamia. And the people of Israel served Cushion Rishatham eight years.

But when the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel who saved them. Othniel, the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. The spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he judged Israel.

He went out to war, and the Lord gave Cushion Rishatham, king of Mesopotamia, into his hand. And his hand prevailed over Cushion Rishatham. So the land had rest for 40 years.

[5:59] Cushion Rishatham, then Othniel, the son of Kenaz, died. Okay, who can say Cushion Rishatham? I'm pretty kind of proud of myself right there.

Just getting through that. There are four parts of a cycle that gets repeated with each of these judges. And so let me walk you through it with Othniel.

The first of these four moves is this. We see it in verse 7. The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. What was this evil that they did?

Well, keep on reading. It's twofold evil. They forgot. The Lord, their God. And served the Baals and the Ashereth.

So, the first part of the evil is their theological amnesia. They forgot their God. They forgot the God who delivered them.

[7:00] Their God. The God who made a covenant with them. That he would be their God and they would be his people. This is not just some kind of passive forgetfulness.

Though there is that. We've all experienced. You know what? I haven't even thought about God for the last seven hours. There's that. But there's an active forgetfulness where you purposefully put God out of your mind.

This is the generation we read about in 2.10 that did not know the Lord or his great works. So, the first part of the evil is forgetting God. Theological amnesia.

And the second part of this evil is cultural accommodation. And so, when God ceases to be the controlling center of your life, something else will.

A false God. The God of the surrounding nations. Or gods. And that's what happens. The Baals and Ashereth.

[8:05] This is the move towards cultural accommodation. We forget God. Theological amnesia. And then we go into cultural accommodation. Worshipping the gods of the people around us.

When we forget our God. We forget that Jesus Christ is the controlling, treasured center of our life. It creates a vacuum. And the world tells us what to put in it. This is the evil in God's sight. By the way, Baal and Ashereth worship was quite a kind of worship service.

Do you know what kind of worship service it was? Sexual. Cult prostitutes. Your Canaanite neighbor says, Hey, you want to come to worship service with me?

You know what they're asking you to come to? When we forget our God. And we accommodate to the world.

[9:09] It inevitably ends up in some kind of sexual distortion. So the first thing that we see here is Israel doing evil in the sight of the Lord.

And he sees it all. Proverbs 15.3 The second move in this is verse 8. The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.

And he sold them into the hand of Cush and Rishatham. King of Mesopotamia. Now just a reminder. I told you about this anger last week. This anger isn't some kind of like. Stop walking on eggshells around your dad.

This anger is a jealous, just anger. This is the God who had covenanted himself to this people. And delivered them out of Egypt.

Egypt. It's like he was the husband. And Israel was his bride. And they were to be faithful to each other. And so in God's just jealousy.

[10:14] His anger. His just anger is kindled. And he raises up an oppressor. One of Israel's enemies. Remember, this is so ironic.

The very people that Israel is supposed to be dispossessing because they fail. God raises up to discipline them. And God's anger is always purposed.

Baby, come back. God is seeking to bring about pain in his people to change their perspective.

Baby, come back. So, Kushin Rishathayim, which literally means doubly wicked. God, the sovereign over all the nation.

He sells his people. He hands them over to Kushin Rishathayim for eight years. To change them. To convince them.

[11:16] Don't whore after them. That's the kind of language. Whoredom. Judges 2.17.

Israel's going after other gods is a prostituting of herself. From Yahweh. So, he oppresses his beloved for eight years to change her thinking.

Which brings us to the third aspect of this cycle. Israel cries out.

Nine. But when the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. They cry out. It's not clear whether this crying out is a genuine crying out of godly sorrow.

It's not clear if this is genuine repentance. Because we saw it even in Judges 2.1-5. The Bokeem incident.

[12:27] Weeping. Crying. But it's not clear that it's genuine. You know what would be going on here. It's like a faithful husband who's married to a wife who's prostituting herself.

After eight years of prostituting herself to other guys. Comes back and says, hey honey, I just need a place to crash. To be safe. Nothing said. Of her infidelity.

It's not clear. It leaves you guessing. But what's striking. Is what happens next. God hears his people.

This moves into the fourth move of the cycle. Nine B. But when the people of Israel cried out to the Lord. The Lord raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel who saved them.

Othniel. The son of Canaz. Caleb's younger brother. What I want you to see is the connection between how fast it is in verse nine. The people cry out.

[13:33] God raises up a deliverer. It's like that. Know what it's like? It's like this. Remember Jesus? The parable of the prodigal son. The son says to his dad, give me all my inheritance.

I think you're as good as dead. I'm going to go take this money and do what I want. He spends his money on prostitutes for years. Comes to an end to himself. He's coming back to his house. His dad. He's thinking maybe I can be his servant.

But remember what his dad was doing? Watching and waiting. And then he runs to his son. The son of mine who is dead. He's alive.

God of grace. Here is Yahweh. Looking, waiting, watching for his whoring bride to come back.

Baby, come back. She comes back.

He raises up a deliverer. His name is Othniel. We learn about him already. 111 through 15. Caleb's relative.

[14:31] He's of good stock. He captured Debir, the city. And he also captured Caleb's daughter's hand. He's kind of like the boy next door. Maybe most liked in the yearbook.

Prom king. Captain of the football team. Eagle scout. Squeaky clean. Serves up meals at Tuesday Shalom Center.

He's a solid dude. But what we see here is that it's the Lord that raises Othniel up. Verse 9b. It's the Lord that rescues Israel from the hand of Cush and Rishithaim in verse 10.

It's the Lord who gives rest to the land for 40 years. Verse 11. It's who's the hero of the story, gang? God is. He does raise up this imperfect Savior.

Othniel does die. He accomplishes a temporary salvation in 40 years. Israel fails. But God is faithful.

[15:41] And here we have a pattern. Israel does evil. God gets angry. Raises up an oppressor. Israel cries out. God in his grace delivers through a judge.

So now, with that in mind, having looked at this Eagle Scout, let's move to the assassin. We're going to see the same pattern in verses 12 through 30 with Ehud.

But there's a difference. A very intentional difference. First, what we see is in verse 12.

And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Look at the end of verse 12. Because they had done what was evil in the sight of the Lord. We're not told what that evil is. But we can, based on precedent, know that it's some kind of theological amnesia in God's people. And then drifting into cultural accommodation. That's what's going on here. It's Canaanizing. It's adopting the gods of the nations around them and living like Canaanites.

[16:57] It's kind of like this. If the world we live in were to be in the world but not of the world, if this world we live in is like a giant above-ground pool, and the world creates a current when, brothers and sisters, we pick up our feet, we go with the current.

So we see, once again, they do evil in the sight of the Lord. And again, Proverbs 15, 3, he sees everything, the good and the evil. Second move, verse 12.

We read this. And the Lord strengthened Eglon, the king of Moab, against Israel. It's a result of God's anger being kindled.

This is an outworking of his jealousy for his people. He loves his bride, and he raises up Eglon, this king of Moab, to oppress his people so that, baby, come back.

A couple things to know about Eglon and the king of Moab. Moab was a distant relative of Israel, and they were not kind to Israel upon the Exodus.

[18:12] Eglon, too, you see him, he's a uniter of God's enemies against Israel. We see this in 13. He somehow establishes the Ammonites and the Malachites to go against Israel.

They defeat him, and they take over the city of Palms, which is Jericho. That should get your attention. Because in Joshua 6, remember, it's Joshua who marches around Jericho, and God gives the victory, and they occupy Jericho.

This is going in the wrong direction. Look at verse 17.

There's something else you need to know about Eglon. He's morbidly obese. He's extremely fat. And he's not the sharpest knife in the drawer.

We'll see that played out in a little bit. But in verse 14, Israel served Eglon for 14 years. 14 years of oppression.

[19:24] 14 years of bringing tribute, silver and gold, to this king. They're a vassal state of Moab. So they're being oppressed. And the Lord is behind it.

Maybe come back. The third thing of this cycle that we're seeing is in verse 15. Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord.

Again, we're not quite sure what kind of crying out this is. We're not giving the details of it. But just as Israel with Cushion, Rishatham, they had forgot their God for eight years, and then they remember him.

Now Israel, after 14 years, remembers their God. And they cry out to him. And they cry out to him. And then in verse 14, oh, excuse me, the fourth move sets in.

Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, and the Lord raised up for them a deliverer. Remember, this is God waiting and watching for his people to cry out in his grace.

[20:31] They cry out to him, and he provides for them an imperfect Savior who's going to accomplish a temporary salvation. But it is relief.

We learn about Ehud that he is a Benjamite, which literally means son of my right hand.

But he's a lefty. He's a lefty son of my right hand. Any lefties in the room? This is not some kind of like God saying lefties are bad.

Lefties actually had an advantage in battle. Some scholars think that Ehud was ambidextrous. But right out of the gate, you notice something's different about him.

Now, the pattern that we saw with Othniel was this. Israel cries out, and then God raises up a judge. He rescues his people from that kind of enemy, and then he gives the land rest for a certain amount of time.

[21:44] And one is kind of expecting that as we read this. But what happens in verse 15 is that, yes, God raises up Ehud. But if you move forward to verses 27 through 30, it's later on that we learn that God rescues his people from Moab.

That the Lord gives his enemies into their hands. Verse 29, they kill 10,000 of those Moabites. Not a man escapes. That's the rescue.

And then in verse 30, the land is given rest for 80 years, two generations. And so you have this pattern, but it's broken up.

And so you're not like, what's in between? What's in between the raising up of this judge, this deliverer, and God's rescue and giving of rest?

And what's in between is a really graphic assassination account. And we've got to ask the question, why is that there?

[22:49] So let me just walk you through a crown. It's graphic, just to be aware. So Ehud, he gets selected to be part of a group of people who bring tribute to Eglon.

And so they're going to bring like a chest of gold and silver because they are vassals of Moab. But what we learn in verse 16 is that Ehud sees this as an opportunity.

He makes for himself a sword, an 18-inch sword, a double-edged, literally double-mouthed sword. And because he's a lefty, he straps it to his right thigh.

And whether it's on the inside or outside of his thigh, it was concealed. And so what we see is someone's planning something. This is an opportunity of sorts.

What is Ehud going to do with that knife? By the way, that knife is not a slashing sword. It is a piercing dagger. It requires you to be up close and personal to use.

[24:02] So what we then read is that Ehud and this company, they deliver the tribute, verse 17, to Eglon king of Moab.

And then in verse 18, Ehud and his group, well, they leave. They start going back to their homes. But in verse 19, Ehud says, I'm turning back.

And he turns back at the idols of Gilgal. Again, this is just another hint, reminder that there's Canaanization happening. And he gets back to Jericho.

And he gets back in front of King Eglon. And he says something very tantalizing to him. In verse 19, he says, I have a secret message for you, O king.

And we know what the secret message is. But Eglon doesn't. And so what Eglon does is this. He dismisses all of his attendants, servants and bodyguards.

[25:07] What that first visit did was establish some trust between Ehud and Eglon. And now that Ehud's back with a secret message, Eglon's like, yeah, wait, yeah, everybody out.

And you know what he's done? He's left himself alone with Ehud. We're seeing some gullibility here.

We're seeing some trusting, some unawares, or we're aware of what's really happening. So in verse 20, now Ehud is alone with Eglon.

And he kind of says this something again, but even more tantalizing. He says, I have a message from God for you. And we all know that Ehud means this 18-inch message.

Eglon doesn't. And so in verse 20, Eglon stands up. And you know what that's a picture of?

[26:16] Vulnerable. And then in 21 and 22, Ehud strikes like a viper. He grabs the blade with his left hand on his right thigh, and it gets super graphic.

The story slows down. We get so much detail. This is to be imprinted on your mind for a reason.

And he takes that blade, and he sticks it into Eglon.

And he puts it in so far, he lets it go, and the fat rolls of Eglon close around it. It's disgusting.

But that's not it. It gets even worse. At the end of verse 22, the dung came out. I don't know how that works biologically. I don't know if that blade hit a nerve, but he lost control of his bowels. And so it is just disgusting. Fat rolls covering the sword. His feces coming out all over the place. He literally had a bowel movement. And then in 23 and 26, Ehud somehow locks the attendants out of this room that they are in, and he escapes.

[27:33] And while he's on his escape, his attendants start getting very uncomfortable about the amount of time that's passing. In fact, they think Eglon is actually going to the bathroom.

And we, this is dark humor, we know he's had a bowel movement. They eventually find a key. They unlock the door. They find Eglon dead on the floor in his feces. And Ehud is long gone. What is this doing here?

In verses 27 through 30, now kind of the rest of the story picks up. He goes back, he plays the shofar, and the Ephraimites come, and they go down, they capture the fords of the Jordan, and then they just decimate 10,000 Moabites.

The Lord gives them into their hand. Rescue! And then the land is given rest for 80 years. You know what?

[28:36] Who's the hero of the story? God is. But you know what this little account does? Ehud kind of eclipses God in this. We're left wondering about this imperfect Savior, this temporary salvation.

We're left wondering. We're maybe even a little uneasy about this Ehud. And what you need to know is that God is not, like, endorsing this account. What you're going to see in the book of Judges again and again and again is that we go from bad to worse with Judges.

They're compromised characters. They become more and more clear. Wait till we get to Samson. But we're left asking a question like this.

Is this an assassination or a murder? Is this equivalent to what the Judahites did to Adonai Bezek when they cut off his thumbs and big toes?

Is this out of the Canaanite playbook? We don't know. And that's the point. It's getting confusing.

[29:54] Is this canonization? Let me put it another way. Let's say you've got a 22-year-old daughter. She's not married.

And on the same day, Othniel and Ehud propose to your daughter to marry them. Your daughter's like, Mom, Dad, I need help deciding between the two.

Who do I marry? Do I marry the Eagle Scout? Or do I marry the assassin? Maybe a murderer. What do you tell her? Marry the Eagle Scout.

It helps you start to see the digression between these judges. Their character is not the same. Canonization's going on here.

And what we're going to see is this digression happening more and more and more. God's people fail. But God remains faithful.

[30:57] He raises up an imperfect Savior and brings about a temporary salvation. But you're left kind of like, huh. I'm not sure what quite to think about that.

So what does this mean for us? Well, just on one level, I want you to help you to see the pattern in the book of Judges.

Israel does what's evil in God's sight. God, in his anger, raises up someone to oppress them. Israel then cries out, and God, in his grace, delivers.

I just want you to see that pattern. But what does that mean for us now? It's a warning against worldliness. Against canonization.

About theological amnesia and cultural accommodation. Think of these accounts that start in verse 7 and verse 12 with Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

[32:02] Think of them as warning signs for us. You know, there's warning signs in Kenosha right now. You know Lighthouse Pier?

There's a warning sign. Don't go in the water. You're going to be swept away by a current. People die off that pier.

The other warning sign is down by La Fagata. The mouth of the Pike River. Warning signs. Ripped currents. People die over there. We've got two warning signs in our city of dangerous currents that sweep you away.

But these two accounts, these two, they did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, are warning signs for us.

The world generates a dangerous current, brothers and sisters. And if you're unaware of it, you're just walking by warning signs. Both of these accounts show us what happens when you forget God. [33:21] Here's what our culture does. When thinking about who God is, the world tends to say things like this.

Well, even if there is a God, aren't all the different gods kind of leading to the same salvation? It's a way that the world thinks that all religions are the same.

They're just trying to figure out different ways to the same God. But in our Bibles, Jesus says things that I'm the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me.

There's no other name given among men by which they can be saved. There's only one God. All other gods are just demonic distortions. Misleading people.

If you've been pulled into that current, you need to get your feet underneath you.

[34:26] Another way that the world thinks that's very dangerous is when it comes to biblical sexual ethics. It's the Bible clearly teaches that the gift of sex is to be enjoyed between one man, chromosomal man, one chromosomal woman, united together before God exclusively for life.

And what the world will say are things like, that's old-fashioned. That's passé. That's kind of outdated. But if you were to ask God what he thinks about a biblical sexual ethic, he says, oh, this is my gift to all of humanity.

This is my design. This is for your good. And to ignore it is to ignore it at your peril. Brothers and sisters, can you see it?

Can you see that we're in it? We live in these currents daily. But it doesn't stop with just the way that the world thinks about things.

It continues with what the world values. I want to put a phrase in your mind. I've used it before, and I want you to get familiar with it.

[35:41] It's the word expressive individualism. What the world values is personal autonomy. It's self-determination.

It shows up in language like speak your truth. It shows up in this biblically foreign idea that you can determine your own gender based upon how you feel.

These things are evil in God's sight, brothers, sisters. This is not of God. There's a book. I referenced it last week. Carl Truman, Strange New World.

You need to get it. You need to read it. It helps you to think about this expressive individualism, this value that permeates our culture. It's the currents that we're in.

And if your feet aren't on solid ground, you will get pulled. What expressive individualism is, is this.

[36:43] When you forget your God, expressive individualism says, you are your God. It's me, Dollar Tree.

There's also the danger of the world's methods. Did Ehud murder Eglon?

Was that a Canaanite playbook thing? The world says the ends justify the means. Whatever you need to do in order to get that done, do it.

But God says, no, I am just as concerned about the means you use as the ends that I have called you to. So if you are cohabitating with someone who is not your spouse, that's an unbiblical means to an end.

It's evil in God's sight. God would not have you do that. He'd call you to something else. There are other world's methods.

[37:55] We see it in politics, brothers and sisters. The world's means to the world's ends. Who's in control? God's in control.

So maybe you're in this room right now and you're thinking, man, I've kind of waded out into a current.

What do I do? Maybe you've been swept. And you're in one of the rip currents of this worldliness that we're in.

What do you do? You cry out. You cry out to the one God has raised up who is the perfect Savior and has accomplished a permanent salvation.

And can I just encourage you, if you're aware that you have bought into some kind of worldliness and that you have forgotten your God, don't wait 14 years. Don't wait 8 years.

[39:01] Don't wait 14 months or 8 months. Don't wait 14 hours or 8 hours. Don't wait 14 minutes or 8 minutes.

As soon as you realize by God's gracious, convicting work of His Spirit that you have forgotten your God and now are adrift in the current of Canaan.

As soon as you realize that, cry out to Him. And you know what you're going to find? Solid ground under your feet. He's the perfect Savior.

Permanent salvation. Brothers and sisters, all day long we're going to be tested today. All week long we're going to be tested. We're going to be either picking our feet up in the current or we're going to be standing in Christ against the current.

And so there's this warning against worldliness. But there's also a wooing to the wonder of Jesus.

[40:07] Remember Othniel? Squeaky clean Eagle Scout. He's imperfect. He's imperfect. He died. Surely, we know from our Bibles that there was sin in His heart.

And He accomplished a temporary salvation. 40 years. One generation. But He seems to have a squeaky clean reputation. Do you know who out-righteoused Him?

Jesus. He is the greatest of all squeaky clean Eagle Scouts. Never sinned once. 33 years. Perfect obedience.

Ehud. Imperfect Savior. We're not sure if He is an assassin, murderer, if that's good or bad. He accomplished a temporary salvation of 80 years, two generations.

You know how Jesus outstrips Him? Jesus is no assassin. He doesn't take lives.

[41:11] He gave His life for His people. Oh, He is a perfect Savior. Savior. And the salvation He accomplished is permanent.

He's alive. He offers it. The rest He offers is not a 40-year rest. It's not an 80-year rest. It is an eternal rest.

Eternal life. Peace with God forever. That's what Jesus Christ accomplished. He's the perfect Savior who has accomplished a perfect, permanent salvation.

Sinless life. Fully God. Fully man. Died in our place. Raised from the dead. Alive today. Offer salvation to all for eternity. You know what I need to tell you?

Don't wander. Don't wade into the dangerous waters of the world. No, no.

[42:24] Stand firm on Christ. Your perfect Savior. Permanent salvation. Stand on Him. Stand in Him. When we fail, and surely we will, He will remain faithful.

But we stand on Him. We purpose to that. It's like we're all living in a huge above-ground pool called the world.

We're in the world, but we're not to be of the world. The world is the spiritually dead humanity who organized rebellion of God against God.

And the world creates currents. God in His grace. But God in His grace has raised up the greatest judge of all. He's alive.

He's standing against the current of the world. And so now we cling to Him. And so now we cling to Him. And we cling to each other. And we stand firm in Him. Can I just tell you what He says?

[43:24] Let this be an encouragement to you. End of John 16. I have said these things to you, disciples, that in me you may have peace.

In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart. I have overcome the world. Don't wade into the dangerous waters of the world, brothers and sisters.

Stand firm in Jesus Christ. Our controlling center. The overcomer of the world. Will you pray with me? Father, thank You so much for pouring Your Spirit out on Jesus.

Our Redeemer. Our Deliverer. And Jesus, thank You so much for pouring the same Spirit out on us. Would You strengthen us in the Spirit according to Your Word.

To stand firm in the Lord. And having done everything, we stand. Stand in Christ. Because You, Lord Jesus, have overcome the world.

[44:42] You are the perfect Savior. Yours is a permanent salvation. And it's in You we trust. Amen.