

# JUDGES Expect the Unexpected

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[ 0 : 01 ] As some of you might know, we have an eight-month-old daughter, Sera. Recently, she finally started to sit by herself without any help.

Even a few weeks ago, when we went back to Japan, she couldn't sit up. Because of this, she wouldn't let us leave her by herself.

It was also a real challenge to hold her for more than eight hours, nine hours on the airplane. So when I saw her sit by herself for the first time, I was so excited.

But until that stage, she actually went through many different stages. And lots of practice, so she could sit by herself.

At first, she started to move her hands and legs. And then she started to touch her feet with her hands. And she also started to roll over and back.

[ 1 : 18 ] She was continually practicing moving her body and learning to control it using her muscle. And in the end, she finally made it.

I'm really proud of her. I've been learning throughout those last eight months that children learn to master things by repeating them over and over and over again.

To achieve those things, they need to go through many different stages day to day. But it's not only in parenting.

We can see this. But many things are improved in this way. So if you experience the opposite of this, how would you feel?

If you repeated things and went through different stages. But things went to different stages. But things are more and more worse and worse.

[ 2 : 26 ] Kind of a downward spiral. Naturally, you would feel really discouraged. And even upset with things.

Right? Actually, we will see this sort of negative spiral cycle in the book of Judges. Today, we will have a look at this Judges cycle first.

And we will investigate chapter 3 and focus on two Judges. So first of all, who were the judges? When we hear the word judge, we might think of something like this. If someone does something wrong, the judge decides whether they are innocent or guilty.

Or if you like to follow the tennis, a judge means kind of an empire. Empire. In the Old Testament, however, the word judge is not used in the modern sense.

[ 3 : 43 ] Judges weren't judge-courled officials. Rather, they were often military leaders who handed out justice to Israel's enemy and oppressors.

In other words, the judges were deliverers or saviors who redeemed the people from slavery and the other nations. As Steve preached in his last two messages, Israel failed to drive idols out on their land.

Steve highlighted the dramatic tension between God's holy commands and his loving, faithful promise. On the other hand, God demands obedience from Israel.

Yet, on the other hand, he has promised to save them. As a consequence, Israel enters a cyclical pattern of decline caused by their idolatry and subsequent revival through God's saving mercy.

Today, I give you some paper to draw this cycle on your own. So, if you don't have one, please let us know by raising your hand so that our team can get for you.

[ 5 : 07 ] So, judge cycle. I go through one to seven. Stage one, the people reveal or sin.

Stage two, God is angry. Stage three, God sent the enemies. Stage four, the people cry out.

Stage five, God sent the judge to save. Stage six, peace in the land.

And lastly, stage seven, judge dies. This is called the judge cycle. And it keeps not only repeating, but worsening.

As we progress through chapters three to sixteen, towards the end of the book, Israel's morality has declined so much that they became like a Canaanite.

[ 6 : 15 ] While Israel's moral corruption declines, God's covenant never changes. So, please keep this cycle and downward spiral in your mind as we continue through this series.

So, now with this judge cycle in mind, we can have a look at today's passage. Today, we will be focusing on two judges, Othniel and Ephod.

So, firstly, Othniel. The history of Othniel shows us the judge cycle at its simplest. Let's have a look at the text step by step.

So, stage one, the people reveal all sin. Verse seven says, they forgot the Lord. What is the opposite word of forgot?

Right, it's remember. In the Bible, those words remember and forget are used in regards to spiritual matters.

[ 7 : 21 ] For example, in Psalm 25, 6, when the people asked God to remember your great mercy and love. And in Isaiah 64, 9, they asked God to not remember their sins.

Last week, Steve told us that although the people of Israel knew all about Exodus from slavery in Egypt, the miraculous red sea crossing and all of the other awesome ways that God has rescued them, the saving acts of God were no longer precious to them.

They had not learned to revere and rejoice in what God had done for them. Their hearts were not wholehearted, but half-hearted.

They were holding on to God and the other gods at the same time. Sage two, God is angry.

Chapter three, verse eight says, The anger of the Lord burned against Israel. God was indeed angry. Because his covenant people committed idol worship.

[ 8 : 46 ] If your partner played around with others, what emotion would you feel? Of course, you wouldn't be angry at their betrayal.

That's why God sent trouble to the people to Israel. Verse eight, God sold Israel into the hands of other kings, to whom the Israel was subjected to for eight years.

But even in judging his people, God was merciful to them. If God had not brought about suffering and hardship, Israel would never understand their wrongdoing against God.

They wouldn't know what judgment they are facing. God didn't simply send trouble to his people for the sake of it, but he didn't do so that Israel would turn back to him.

God was faithful to them. Even though Israel didn't love him. Sage four, the people cry out.

[ 10 : 08 ] Finally, after struggling under physical oppression, the people in verse eight B, cried out to the Lord. Although it took eight years for them to see their wrongdoing and need to turn back to the true God, they finally started to cry out.

The only thing the people contribute to their rescue was to cry out to the Lord. We can learn from here that repentance is the key for renewal and restoration.

Verse nine, God sent a leader to the people of Israel.

God's chosen leader was Othniel, the wholehearted disciple who was a member of Caleb's family.

Remember, after Moses, only Josiah and Caleb could enter to the promised land because they had a true faith.

Probably, Othniel learned from Caleb about God and how to serve in the land. At the beginning of the book, chapter one, Othniel showed great faith and strong leadership in the world.

[ 11 : 33 ] In one sense, he was a charismatic type of leader who had power and good reputation. But we shouldn't miss the point that God sent Othniel as the savior.

And also, look at verse 10. The spirit of the Lord came on him. The reason why Israel won through Othniel is that God was with him.

Not because of his physical strength or cleverness in battle. Salvation comes only from God. Stage six, peace in the land.

As a result, verse 11 says, Israel enjoyed peace for 11 years. In stage seven, judge dies. Verse 11 continues, until Othniel, son of Canaz, died.

Actually, this charismatic leader died after 40 years. And this is the first cycle came to the end. Now, hopefully everyone had a kind of clear idea of the judge cycle.

[ 12 : 55 ] We have one more cycle today on EFood. But I want to ask you, do you find that the EFood story gives you a funny sense or sense of bitterness?

I think this story reminds me of something like the investigation drama like CSI, with a great title like Murder in the Toilet, or something like that.

The main character seems like a spy. Actually, if the story is nothing like Othniel, there is great imagery, and time seems to get slower and slower towards to the end of the climax.

We are often bogged down by the details of the story, or unexplained things, but we shouldn't miss the whole point and the context.

Actually, EFood cycle is also a story about how God saves his people. And it says that God is responsible for EFood, because he chose him.

[ 14 : 08 ] God himself raised up for them as a savior. He did not say a murder, an assassin, a liar, or a deceiver, but a savior.

This is the story of the gospel. So let's dive into the passage. With Othniel's death, the cycle begins again. This time, God gave the Israelites over to Egron, king of Moab, who, in verse 13, took possession of the city of Perm.

Actually, the city of Perm was Jericho. Jericho was the place where God had specifically given his obedient people victory over their enemies in Joshua 6.

This is very ironic, because Jericho was Israel's first great success in the inversion of Canaan under Joshua's leadership.

Now the Israelites have lost their great achievement because of their disobedience. The story continues like the Othniel cycle, but this time the Bible keeps focusing on one word, left hand, in verse 15 and 21.

[ 15 : 35 ] Generally speaking, Hebrew literature has a very simple word structure, and it doesn't explain in very much detail like modern languages.

Often, quite often, even, the verb is dropped off. In this context, if a word or phrase is used repeatedly, it means it is very important.

It's something like a highlighter for us. So why here does the Bible keep mentioning Ephus's left hand? If we look up references in the Bible in relation to right hand, we will find that they all have quite positive meanings.

For example, God swears by His right hand. He has pleasure by His right hand. And His chosen one will sit at His right hand.

It is possible that the right hand was a symbol of power and ability in the time of Old Testament. But chapter 315 literally says that Ephus was unable to use his right hand.

[ 17 : 01 ] It is most likely that Ephus's right hand was paralyzed or disabled in some way.

Considering this, Ephus was a surprising choice because he was appointed as Israel military leader, even though he probably couldn't use his right hand in the battle.

Yet, God chose Ephus as a savior for Israel. It's an unexpected choice. In man's eyes, it's almost impossible to win a battle if someone has a physical weakness.

But God chose Ephus this time. Look at verse 19. The king said to his attendants, Leave us.

And they all left. Can you believe that? If Ephus was recognized as a potential danger, King Eggron's gods would probably not have allowed Ephus to stay alone with the king.

Likewise, probably King Eggron did not expect Ephus to be in any way dangerous. His physical limitation probably enabled him to be alone with the king.

[ 18 : 31 ] The narrator makes it very clear in verse 22 that it was Ephus's left hand that allowed him to strike down the enemy.

This unexpected lefty savior is almost the main point of this story. God saved the people of Israel through a lefty judge.

The narrator describes the significance of this event when reporting that the people of Israel followed after Ephus and won the battle, even though the people of Moab were very strong and powerful.

And finally, verse 13 says, they enjoy peace for the next 80 years. This is the second cycle of judges. So what we can learn from this cycle?

As we've seen, Israel repeatedly failed to walk with God faithfully, even though God had so much for them.

[ 19 : 47 ] Today, we saw only two cycles, but Israel experienced exactly the same pattern of sin, repentance, sin, repentance, and so on.

Even though Israel was unfaithful, God was faithful to his covenant. He sent the enemies, the judges, and his spirit to try restore the relationship between them.

People don't deserve God's love and mercy. But this was not just for Israel, but their sin speaks to our own sin. Judges saved Israel from suffering and from their enemies.

Salvation and peace restored on the leadership of God's judges. But it didn't last, since the judge did not last.

They all died. It was only temporary. Although the judge could save the nation of Israel from suffering, and their enemies, they could change, they couldn't change people's heart and attitude towards God.

[ 21 : 02 ] But the Bible said that Jesus is the eternal judge and perfect Savior, better Savior. He said, Do not be afraid.

I am the first and the last. I am the living one. I was dead. And now, look, I am alive forever and ever. Human leaders are limited and temporary.

But Jesus, our Savior, is eternal and unlimited. This cycle points out Jesus is the better and the true Savior to every generation.

As we have seen, Othony was a man, a great faith, and deeds. He had great leadership and military skills.

On the other hand, Ephod had a physical weakness, which was like a handicap. No one would have wanted to choose him to be their military leader, but God chose him as the Savior.

[ 22 : 14 ] So what can we learn from this? That God doesn't always work in obvious ways or by common sense.

He saved his people through Ephod's weakness. And we can see this in our Savior Jesus, can't we? Isaiah 53, 2-3 says, He grew up before him like a tender shoot and like a root out of dry ground.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him. Nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain.

Like one from who people hide their face, he was despised and he hold him in low esteem. Jesus saved us not through military victory or physical strength, but through crushing defeat.

In the historical narratives in Judges, God was showing the world that his salvation was not going to come like a hero movie at all.

[ 23 : 38 ] It would come from the baby born in a major through weakness, not what the world would call strength, not what the world would call victory.

He died on the cross and rose again from death. This is God's unexpected way to save us. Why is that?

Because God wants us to be humble. 1 Corinthians chapter 1 26 to 29 says, Brother and sisters, think what you were when you were called.

Not many of you are wise by human standards. not many were influential. Not many were of novel birth, but God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.

God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to notify, the things that are so that no one may boast before him.

[ 25 : 00 ] Our brain may not make sense of the ways of God. We can't understand why God would choose a judge who had a severe weakness.

Yet, this was God's way to save his people. we can't understand why God sent his only son to the earth to suffer and die for us.

But, we can understand this, that God is righteous yet loves us so much. Even though we are sinners and hopeless, he still wants to restore his relationship with us.

today, who here wants to receive this wonderful invitation? Who wants to repent before God?

Who here needs to renew their faith? The judge's cycle reminds us of our need for spiritual renewal. As a follower of Christ, we need to be renewed by the word of God and by his spirit continuously by crying out to the God.

[ 26 : 14 ] Don't we need to cry out today? If you don't know whether or not you have eternal hope in Christ, today, our God is calling you to come.

Any leaders in the world can't save your life, but our eternal Savior, Jesus, can save you.