

# Set Free From Self--Righteousness

Series: It It Feels Good, Do It! (?)

by Ron R. Ritchie

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The Book of Judges shows us truths about life in a very clear form, a form we all can relate to. It has to do with people, and we relate best to people. We like to see things as they really are; we need examples in our lives of how truth works, so God gives us the nation of Israel as a picture of us. In scripture, Israel is called the "son" as well as the "bride" of God. The Body of Christ is called the "bride" of Christ and we are called "sons." So Israel and the Body of Christ have the same kind of relationship with Christ.

\Now we want to discover who God is, how he's worked among Israel, and how he's working among us; we want to see what is going on around us that is seeking to destroy us. In this passage in Judges 3:7-11 we are going to discover an enemy that is seeking to take Israel into captivity. We are going to find out that there are enemies in our own lives that are seeking to take us into captivity, and we are going to discover what it is about Israel that takes them into captivity. Then we are going to learn what is it that can set us free, or more properly, "Who" it is that can set us free.

Judges 3: 7-11 :

**And the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot the Lord their God, and served the Baals and the Asheroth. Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of Cushan--rishathaim kind of Mesopotamia; and the sons of Israel served Cushan--rishathaim ("the man of double wickedness"] eight years. And when the sons of Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the Lord gave Cushan--rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand, so that he prevailed over Cushan--rishathaim. Then the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.**

We are going to read of the cycle of events that appears in the first chapters of the Book of Judges, and we will see that there are six steps in it. (This is the first cycle of seven in the Book.)

## (1) Israel Did Evil In The Sight Of God

The first step is that Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord. As we have seen, there is quite a difference between what we call evil and what God calls evil. When we go to each other to ask for definitions of what is evil or what is good, we accommodate ourselves. For instance, if we happen to be involved in the sin of adultery and a brother comes and says, "You are in adultery," we say, "Well, you don't seem to understand that it is a loving, caring relationship. I'm sure if my wife knew, she would understand. Besides, everyone is doing it." And in the business world we say that we are not "stealing." We explain that the company owes it to us and we are getting it a little ahead of time. We say, "They know we are doing it; we know we are doing it; no one seems to be upset, so we continue to do it. It is not evil--it's the way things are in our society."

This is the way the world acts. therefore, we buy that philosophy and we end up doing evil in God's sight, but not in our sight. But we must always define truth from God's perspective if we are going to follow him. We cannot continue to buy the philosophy of this world for it will destroy us and it will destroy our relationship with God.

## (2) The Anger Of The Lord Is Kindled Against Them

In verse 8 we read that "the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel." He was angry because Israel forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals. But how do you forget God? How do you put him out of your life? They forgot God who made the everlasting covenant with them, the God who literally "married" them. They forgot their husband. They violated Genesis 17:7 where the marriage contract was set up between God and Abraham. The relationship broke down to such an extent that they felt free to run into the arms of another "lover"--Baal. They wanted a religious experience but they didn't want a religious experience with a living God, so they went and accepted the gods of another nation. That was their sin.

I am intrigued by the fact that it is so easy to forget God. Sometimes I think it isn't, but when I try to forget him it really is easy because the world comes in to fill the vacuum so quickly. For years I designed my vacation time as a time to be alone because I was so involved with people like yourself, teaching the Word, studying, praying, counseling and trying to be available to fill needs. But vacation time was a corner of my life that I determined never to allow God to have any part of. And it's easy. Surround yourself with enough books and you make sure you stay away from any village that has a church in it, stay away from people, and pretty soon you really get into yourself. You feel a little guilty, but you hold it down. Soon you get used to it, but when you come back to go to work it is a kind of a shock because you are not used to relating to people anymore.

I heard Paul Winslow, one of our pastors, and Karen his wife once share how they wanted God to really use them on their vacation and I thought they were crazy! "Don't you ever take a day off?" I asked him. "No," he said, "we just get so excited about meeting all these new people in Canada, New York, etc." Maybe I ought to think that thing through, I thought. So a couple years ago my wife and I asked the Lord to use us on our vacation. Now our vacations are so full, so exciting, so rich that I can't wait for the next one because God is going to be with me and I am going to be with him. We are not going to forget him, and we are not going to go into the arms of someone else.

How did the Israelites get this way? Well they, like us, started to change the definition of sin and the definition of God to conform to their own ideas. And when we start to change these definitions we make up our own religion.

A young man called me this week to ask if I would marry him and his girl. I said, "I'll be glad to talk to you about it. We'll have premarital counseling, and we'll get to know each other. We need to know whether or not you both are Christians, or if one of you is a Christian, whether you're divorced, etc. Just tell me what's happening." He replied, "Well, we're not believers, but now that you've mentioned the religious part, we both believe there's a mountain that we're all going up and God is on top of it. When we get there he'll accept us because we came with an attitude of seeking truth." I looked through my Bible but I just couldn't find any reference to that mountain! I asked him to call me back, and two days later he told me to forget it, that he'd found someone else to marry them who would climb that mountain with them.

### (3) They Are Sold To "The Man Of double Wickedness"

So, because they forsook him, God sells the Israelites into the hands of the king of Mesopotamia, "the man of double--wickedness." If they wanted to experience wickedness the Lord was going to give them a double portion of it.

Mesopotamia is what we call today modern Iraq. It was located between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and it bordered Canaan which was being settled by the Israelites. God strengthened the hand of this self--righteous king of Mesopotamia to take them into captivity. (When the nation was oppressed, God led certain tribes to do battle rather than the whole nation.)

God in his wisdom and love tells his people, "This nation is from the Babylonian culture, and if you want idolatry they are masters of it. I'm going to present you to these masters in the doctrines of demons, and you are going to have idolatry up to your eyeballs. You are going to see what it is like from the inside out, and you are going to experience all the death it produces. Hopefully then you will come to your senses and you'll cry out and come back to me. When you do, you'll come back with a love and appreciation like you've never had before."

#### (4) The Israelites Cry to God

But after eight years in captivity, someone in the camp remembered the living God and said, "Hold it! We are being destroyed; our wives are being destroyed by prostitution. They are into offering our babies as sacrifices to appease their gods. We're weary, depressed and angry. Where is it we came from? Who were we with before we got into this mess?" And someone in the group said, "God! The living and true God! The God who led us out of Egypt--that God!"

Another man said, "Let's pray to him to get us out of this captivity." So they started to pray as a nation and God, the only living and true God, heard and answered their prayer. Although they'd been away for eight years! What would you do if your son or daughter left in a huff and told you off and went away and then called you eight years later and said, "Hey, can I come home?" What would you do? It's a struggle, isn't it? I think that is why God gives us the prodigal son story in so many ways that are so applicable to us. A father listens to the voice of his child and can't wait for that moment when he or she comes home to open the door and say, "Welcome home!"

#### (5) God Raises Up Othniel

So God heard their prayer and raised up a deliverer. He produced Othniel (whose name means "God is mighty") to deliver them from the "man of double--wickedness." And the reason Othniel was able to deliver the people of Israel was because the Spirit of the Lord was upon him and he was able to accomplish the task that no one else could do in the eight years of their captivity. When the Spirit of God--the third member of the Trinity, the Person of the Holy Spirit who has equal glory and power with the Father and the Son, who proceeds from the Father and his Son to do God's work on earth, who convicts the heart and regenerates the soul, who gives us comfort, who provides truth for us, who gives us discernment, who gives us wisdom, knowledge, courage and strength--came upon Othniel he delivered them.

But before the enemy could be defeated, before God could work, he needed to give Othniel the wisdom to judge the people, to say to them, "Here's what's wrong, now let's make it right," so he gave Othniel the Spirit of judgment. Then he went to war in the strength of the Lord.

#### (6) Rest And Peace

After Othniel had defeated "the man of double--wickedness, God gave the Israelites rest and peace for 40 years.

#### (7) So What's The Point?

We need so much to learn what God is doing among us. This is a picture of the mighty hand of God defeating the self--righteous "man of double--wickedness." He was self--righteous because he thought he didn't need God, so he continued to develop a religion that was against God Almighty and created his own form of righteousness. But it took God's man to defeat that sense of righteousness.

We have the same problem in our own lives. Our flesh wants to redefine evil and then it wants to build idols of self--righteousness, idols that cry out, "You can do it your way. You're capable of handling your own life. You don't need Jesus Christ as Lord; you don't need to die in order to live; you don't need to crucify the flesh. Come with us. Live a full life and sprinkle enough religion in it so you won't be guilty. "

The principle here is that God hates the sin of self--righteousness, but he loves us. If we insist on forgetting him and putting confidence in the flesh, he will turn us to our own desires and allow us to experience the full consequences of that sin. But when we come to our senses and cry out to him he will hear our cry; he will send his Son to deliver us, to forgive our sins, and bring us into a place and a period of peace and rest.

Israel wanted to go their own way and they chose not merely to go, but to get involved in another religion, a religion that would feed their self-righteousness, this feeling that they were the center of the world--"I'm O.K.

and I don't need God. I'm God. I'm always right and all the others are wrong." But they found that that approach to life led to captivity instead of freedom. The only way they could escape was to cry to God. God heard their prayers and set them free for forty years through a man whose name meant "God is Mighty."

What is it in our lives that takes us and holds us captive? What is it about our flesh that constantly wars against the Spirit? Is it self--righteousness? Self--righteousness will hold you captive as long as you insist you're perfect and all of us are imperfect. You won't be able to minister; you won't be free to serve God, and you won't enjoy life as God intended you to enjoy it.

What else is holding us captive? Is there bitterness among us? Is there hostility? Is there anger? I heard of a man yesterday who is angry at us here for the last several years. How is he going to get out of that? He's going to have to cry out to the Lord. God will hear his prayer and will send a deliverer in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Are you struggling within your heart? Are there people you just don't like in this congregation? Are you thankful they sat over in that section today so you could slip out that door and have nothing to do with them? The battle goes on. You call it a battle but God calls it captivity. You are caught and you can't get out. You struggle and you try harder. You're not going to do what God asks--you are going to do it your way.

A man told me this week that he would love to trust God but he's so afraid he'll lose his life. I said, "That's the key! You'll lose your life!" But he said, "I don't want to lose it." I said, "It's not worth anything. Look at it! It's all flesh; it's all depending on yourself. Is that what you want? Everything you do has been falling apart so why do you continue to depend on the flesh?" "But what else is there?" he asked. "Well, there isn't a vacuum," I said. "You're not going to step into a vacuum; you are going to step into the very life of Christ who is going to set you free."

We've only been given the power to choose, not the power to do. But what we choose then determines what we do. If we choose the flesh, we must reap the consequences of the flesh. But we can choose to get out of there at any time. God will hear our prayer. He will send a deliverer and the deliverer will set us free and bring rest and peace into our lives. However, we don't have to choose the flesh. Because we have a relationship with Jesus Christ we have within us the power to choose the Spirit. If we choose the Spirit we can enjoy the life of Christ in us now. We can enjoy all the thrill and pleasure and the abundant life that God has called us to. It is ours. Just simply choose.

Speaking to the elders of Israel Joshua said, "I don't know whether you men are going to choose the gods in Egypt or the gods in the land we are going to. As for me and my house, we are going to serve the Lord." Joshua never experienced captivity, defeat or death. He lived in the Spirit and experienced all the fruit of the Spirit.

Our Heavenly Father, thank you so much for the Book of Judges and how you teach us simple truths that are the key to life. Thank you so much for the fact that if we want to we can walk with you right now. If we are held in captivity today, if something is destroying our relationship with you, I pray, Father, that you will take those people whom you love and that you will give them the courage to choose you and therefore be set free. We cannot set ourselves free, only you can do that. Lord, for those who are walking in the Spirit today I pray that you will continue to bless them that they may be encouraged and they may see that it is no joy at all to be in captivity with "the man of double--wickedness." Help them see that there is nothing but misery, fear, and frustration in that. It creates all kinds of hostility and bitterness. I pray that you will teach us, encourage us and help us to see that you are among us, that you are alive, and we have no need to forget you or to run to other gods. For all of our lives, all of you is sufficient for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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