

Sermon for January 31, 2021, “The Nations Left in Canaan”

SCRIPTURE - Judges 3:1-6 ¹Now these are the nations that the LORD left to test all those in Israel who had no experience of any war in Canaan ²(it was only that successive generations of Israelites might know war, to teach those who had no experience of it before): ³the five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites who lived on Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal-hermon as far as Lebo-hamath. ⁴They were for the testing of Israel, to know whether Israel would obey the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their ancestors by Moses. ⁵So the Israelites lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; ⁶and they took their daughters as wives for themselves, and their own daughters they gave to their sons; and they worshiped their gods.

Introduction: Judges

The book of Judges is background for the most difficult times in the Old Testament. Joshua, the leader of the Israelites who succeeded Moses died, and this is the background circumstances before the king appeared in Israel. The book of Judges clearly describes what God does for the Israelites through these difficulties; how He responds to the cry of the Israelites and intervenes in their lives.

But what God does for us is often different from what we think. God directly chose judges to help the Israelites, and sometimes He tells the Israelites to repent. In some cases, He speaks to the parents of those who will be judges, and He even chose women as judges for Israelites.

So, after praying, we must always open our hearts and wait for the Lord's answer. Otherwise, we may miss the answer of God, who works differently than we expect.

I hope that through today's text we will see how God may work for us. I hope we will discover the faith, wisdom, and principles we need to walk with God.

Body: The Nations Left in Canaan

It can be seen from those left in the land of Canaan that what God does for us is different from what we expect. God left enemies of the Israelites in the land of Canaan. They were two kinds of enemies. One as Israel's enemy in war and the other was Israel's spiritual enemy. **Judges 3:3 says, “the five rulers of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites living in the Lebanon mountains from Mount Baal Hermon to Lebo Hamath.”**

These are enemies who lived with the Israelites and threatened the Israelites' religious life. The Israelites had to fight spiritually with those who lived with them. Then, why did God leave these enemies to the Israelites?

1. The reason why God left enemies for the Israelites

If God destroyed all enemies of Israel, it would have been good for the Israelites. But why did God leave enemies behind for the Israelites? Likewise, it would be great if there were no difficulties for us who live in a life of faith. By the way, why is He always giving prayer topics and difficulties for us?

In today's text, we can know why God left enemies of Israel for Israelites. **Judges 3:2 says, “He did this only to teach warfare to the descendants of the Israelites who had not had previous battle experience.”** And following **Judges 3:4 says, “They were left to test the Israelites to see whether they would obey the LORD's commands, which he had given their forefathers through Moses.”**

There are two reasons why God left enemies to Israelites. One was to teach warfare and let them learn about it. Another was to test whether the Israelites would keep the LORD's commands.

But, why should Israel learn warfare? Looking at the history of Israel that the Bible tells, Israel experienced the power of God while fighting, and they became one through fighting.

The reason why the Israelites crossed the Red Sea like dry land was because the Egyptian soldiers chased Israelites. In the course of the war for conquest of Canaan, the Israelites destroyed the town of Jericho when they circled the town seven times. Also, the Israelites gained advantage to the Amalekites only when Moses' hands did not drop.

The reason why the Israelites became stronger was because they fought with their faith. If the Israelites had not fought, their faith would not have grown. In this way, God leaves warfare for us in order to grow as a soldier of a holy nation.

The second reason God left an enemy to the Israelites was to test whether the Israelites kept the LORD's commands.

There were two tests: 1) to make sure we make time for God's Word. This is to see if we read, meditate, and learn the Word first, no matter how busy we are in our daily lives. Another is 2) about the application of the Word. It is to see if we actually decide, judge, and live according to the Word of God while living in the world.

So, what was the Israelites' reaction to God's plan?

2. The reaction of the Israelites

But the Israelites do not fight their enemies and do not live according to the Word of God. **Judges 3:6 says, "They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods."**

The Israelites must live without forgetting the purpose of God's Exodus of them. But they forget the purpose that God called and chose. What God wants for Israel is to go through a narrow gate, to live a life that is distinct from the world, to believe that there is no other blessing but the Lord, and to live the good fight according to the Word.

But Israel chose the wide gate. Rather than fighting to go through a narrow gate, they compromised with the world and went on a wide and comfortable path. They did not live by faith according to the Word, but they lived according to common sense and reason.

What does God do for those Israelites?

3. What God does

Let's look at **Judges 3:8. "The anger of the LORD burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram Naharaim, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years."**

Israelites faced difficulties for eight years through the enemies of Israel. Cushan-Rishathaim, the most feared enemy, faced Israelites in the book of Judges. The name Cushan-Rishathaim means **"man from Cush, he of the twofold crime."** Israel can never beat him. So the Israelites served the country for eight years.

But the Israelites did not cry out to God from the beginning. They turned to God for help only after eight years had passed. Only after eight years did the Israelites confess that there was only one God who can be truly trusted and sought for help. We must not forget that God is not the one who moves as we wish, but who governs the world according to His will.

God hears the cry of the Israelites and sends Othniel to judge for Cushan-Rishathaim. Let's look at **Judges 3:9. "But when they cried out to the LORD, he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, who saved them."**

The Spirit of the Lord comes upon Othniel in full. Since Othniel is filled with the Spirit of the Lord, Cushan-Rishathaim never looks special. Othniel does not fear a fight. God is with Othniel and he wins. And true peace comes to the Israelites.

Conclusion: Where does true peace come from?

Now let's summarize today's sermon. **Judges 3:11 says, "So the land had peace for forty years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died."**

It is mentioned that Judge Othniel died 40 years after the Israelites were at peace. The peace that the Lord gives is not just given. It comes from fighting the Lord's enemies through faith, and not compromising their faith that the Lord has given to us with the world we encounter. Even if we have to go through the narrow gate and do hard work, we can enjoy peace when we live courageously according to the Word of God in faith.

Psalm 16:6 says, "The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance."

There is nothing more precious than what the Lord has left us as an inheritance. Let us live by faith that regards the love of Jesus as the most precious, rather than being taken away by the values of the world. Then we will also enjoy true peace in Jesus Christ.