

# Judges Chapter 3 v 1 - 11

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[ 0 : 00 ] of Judges chapter 3 beginning at verse 1. Just to remind you if you were unaware of the setting, Judges is written after Joshua and the people had conquered the land, the land that had been inhabited by the Canaanites and Hivites and Jebusites and so on over several years, around about 20 or so years.

And then Joshua died, we're told in chapter 2, and many of those who had come into the promised land from the wilderness had died as well. And so in the promised land, in that new nation, here is what happens after those initial victories.

These are the nations the Lord left to test all those Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars in Canaan. He did this only to teach warfare to the descendants of the Israelites who had not had previous battle experience.

The five rulers are the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites living in the Lebanon mountains from Mount Baal-Herman to Lebo-Hamath.

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. The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.

[ 1 : 27 ] They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons and served other gods. The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and Asherahs.

The anger of the Lord burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hands of Cushan Rishathayim, king of Aram Neharaim, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years.

But when they cried out to the Lord, he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel, son of Canas, Caleb's younger brother, who saved them.

The spirit of the Lord came upon him so that he became Israel's judge and went to war. The king gave Cushan Rishathayim, king of Aram, into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him so the land had peace for 40 years until Othniel, son of Canas, died.

Well, we'll look at that passage a little later on. Let's turn then back to Judges and chapter 3. And just have a few moments as we think upon this passage.

[ 2 : 54 ] So, Judges and chapter 3. I want us to continue the theme of prayer that we began this morning on this important week of prayer, the start of the new year.

And this morning we thought about prayer from Exodus, chapter 2 and 3, where God's people were praying and crying out and calling to God.

And we looked at the Lord, the God, who hears prayer. And we saw reasons from that passage why we should pray and why we should have faith to believe and trust that God will hear our prayers and will answer our prayers.

And so I want to continue with that here in Judges, again in the Old Testament. And now, the book of Judges may not be the first place that we might spring to mind when we think of prayer, and particularly encouragement to prayer, because the book of Judges, and I hope you've read it, and if you haven't, then do read it.

It will shock you and surprise you for all the wrong reasons. Because the book of Judges recounts one of the most ungodly periods in the life of God's people in history.

[ 4 : 06 ] But, of course, as we read it, then we encounter God. We encounter the same God who we come to in prayer today and who we have fellowship with through the Lord Jesus.

And as we read it, we find that it is filled with God's grace and goodness. In one sense, as Paul says in Romans, chapter 3, where sin abounds, grace much more abounds.

And surely in Judges that's the case. We see lots of sin, but we see lots of God's grace too. And so, I've picked one part. I've picked that first chapter, that first chapter 3 and the first 11 verses, because they tell the story, the events of the very first of the judges, or the deliverers that God gave to his people after they were settled in the Promised Land.

And sadly, the reason they needed a deliverer, this man Othniel, was because they were backslidden people. They were sinful people whose lives had turned very quickly away from the God who delivered them out of Egypt, who brought them through the wilderness, and brought them into the Promised Land in keeping with all his promises and covenant.

And very quickly they turned away. We see that there in verse 7. The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord. They forgot the Lord, their God, and served the Baals and the Asherahs.

[ 5 : 31 ] Those were the local gods of the Canaanites that they had overwhelmed and overcome. And God had specifically shown them the weakness and the emptiness of those gods. And yet, very quickly they forgot the Lord and turned to false gods.

That is something of a natural tendency, if I put that away, within the lives of human men and women. Men and women are created to worship God.

And if we do not worship the living God, then we will not worship nothing. We will worship something false. Now you may say, well, what about people who are atheists? Well, people who are atheists are people who worship humanity more often than not.

Or they worship science. Or they worship man's ability and intellect and so on. Men and women are made to worship. They will always worship either the living God who made them and created them.

Or they will worship something false. And so it was here. It's not just that they forgot the Lord and went off and did their own thing and didn't have any worship.

[ 6 : 37 ] But rather, they went away from the Lord and they served the Baals and the Asherahs, the false gods of the land. And so chapter 3 is the beginning of really a very long period of rollercoastering for God's people.

A repeated pattern keeps on occurring. And if you read through Judges, as I say and encourage you to do, you get a little bit bored by it in one sense because it's the same old thing. You can almost predict what's going to happen.

One minute, God's people are in sin and backsliding. And because of that, they endure the consequences of their sin, which is that their enemies around about them attack them and steal from them and so on and oppress them.

Then they cry to God. God sends them a deliverer, a judge who rescues them. And they're faithful to God. They return to the Lord. They worship the Lord.

They go on with the Lord. Then they forget again. Then they fall into sin. And the cycle goes on and went on hundreds and hundreds of years. But for these people here, the people that we're looking at in chapter 3, they suffered eight years oppression from this king of Aram Neharim, whose name is Kushan Rish Athaim.

[ 7 : 56 ] It probably isn't pronounced like that at all. Actually, if you want to know how it's pronounced, speak to John Woolin, who will ask David, his son, who's got his qualification in Hebrew, and he'll tell you exactly how it's supposed to be said.

But let's just call him Seah for the time being to make it easier. But there they are. They're oppressed by this king of a foreign land. And for eight years, we're told they're subject to him.

And then we're told they cried to the Lord, verse 9, and he raised up for them, deliverer Othniel. And he delivered them. And verse 11, we have a happy ending to the story.

They all lived happily for 40 years. Now, what I want us to learn from this episode in the life of God's people is particularly the importance of prayer in the life of the church and the necessity of prayer.

Notice that it was when they cried out to the Lord. And I want us to just look at three obvious things here, three important things here, which are true of prayer for us, as they were true of prayer for God's people then and have always been the case, not just for the church, but for us as individuals.

[ 9 : 14 ] And the first thing is this. Prayer precedes God's blessing. Prayer precedes God's blessing. Prayer comes before the blessing of God.

That is the case here. People were under oppression. They were occupied, as it were, for a long time under the yoke of an oppressor. And if you know, my family are from Guernsey and I'm from Guernsey.

My father, grandparents were in Guernsey during the occupation by the Germans for five years, five dark years, difficult years. To be under the oppression and occupation of a foreign power is an unpleasant business.

And it would have been very unpleasant for them. And we don't sort of get a full grasp of that here. But as we read in other cases and situations, it meant that they lost all their livestock.

It meant that they were virtually slaves. They had to pay. They were often taken away from their homes. And all sorts of things. A terrible, difficult time. But the question is this.

[ 10 : 14 ] Well, hold on. Why didn't God do anything about it? For eight years they were occupied. For eight years they were oppressed. Why didn't God do something about it?

Didn't he care about them? Well, yes, we know he cared about them. We know that he does care for his people. Didn't they want to be free from their oppressor over those eight years?

Yes, I'm sure they did want to be free. I'm sure they thought each day and each week, why do we have to put up with the terrible oppression of a CR and his troops and his soldiers?

Why can he be allowed to take all our food and our livestock? So why did nothing happen? God was concerned for them and they didn't like the situation. Why is it nothing happened? Well, the only answer that I can come up with, and I think the only answer that is there, is this.

They never prayed. They didn't pray. Because it says in verse 9, but when they cried out. And the sense is, the implication is, up until then they hadn't cried out to God.

[ 11 : 18 ] No doubt, because of their worship of Asherah and the Baals, they probably prayed to them. Those were their gods. They called upon them. They cried to them. And almost certainly, they got to the point where after eight years, they thought, this is a waste of time.

Us looking to Baal and looking to Asherah and making these sacrifices to these false gods. Nothing's happening. Eventually, the penny dropped.

Eventually, they came to their senses and realized, hold on. Duh. The Lord God's the only one who's going to be able to help us here. It's clear that these gods, these false gods, are empty and foolish and that they are of no use to us.

But they didn't cry to the Lord. They didn't pray. Maybe they thought prayer would do no good. Maybe they thought they were not good enough to pray to God.

Or that God wouldn't hear them. But for whatever reason, they didn't pray. But when they did pray, God sent the deliverer. Prayer precedes God's blessing. Prayer precedes God's blessing.

[ 12 : 48 ] 400 years or so in slavery. And then we're told their cry for help went up to God. God heard their groaning. Remembered his covenant. Was concerned for them.

And so the plan of God, the wheels begin to be in motion where Moses is raised up as a deliverer to bring them into liberty. God answered their prayer.

And so it is all the way through the book of Judges as well. If you look later on in chapter 3, verses 14 and 15. As I said, the cycle, verse 12 says, Israelites did evil again in the sight of the Lord.

What happens? The Israelites, verse 14, subject to Eglon, king of Moab, for 18 years. Verse 15, again, the Israelites cried out to the Lord and he gave them a deliverer.

And so it goes on. Go to chapter 6. It's the same thing. And so on and so on. And it's been that case not only through the history that we have recorded for us of God's people in the scriptures.

[ 13 : 47 ] We can go into New Testament, which we all do in a little while. But all through church history, right up to this present age, God's blessing has been preceded by prayer.

When God's people pray, God acts. One of the reasons we were praying yesterday in the concert of prayer with other Christian believers and joining with Christian groups from around the nation for a concert of prayer was because we are praying for revival.

Praying for God to do a reviving work in his church in these days to bring great blessing. And again, if you read the histories of revival, then you find again and again God's people were moved and prayed and God blessed.

Here's just one which you probably know very, very well concerning the revival of the middle of the 19th century. In 1857, in September 1857, a man by the name of Jeremiah Lanphier began a small prayer meeting in New York.

Just a couple of people with him. A few months later, by the beginning of 1858, the room he was using was crowded. And so in March 1858, they found another place to meet, a large theater, and they started to have a daily prayer meeting at midday.

[ 15 : 06 ] It was packed out in New York. Businessmen came. And then the newspapers, of course, began to take notice and to report on it. The news on the newspaper was 6,000 people were attending prayer meetings in various parts of New York.

And another 6,000 were meeting for prayer in Pittsburgh. Again, in various prayer meetings. Daily prayer meetings held in Washington. Five different times of the day to accommodate the crowds.

Other cities followed that pattern. Soon it became quite common to find, midday, a sign outside a business premises or a shop reading, We will reopen at the close of the prayer meeting.

By May 1858, 50,000 people had become Christians. Out of a population of 800,000 in New York. Charles Finney, the great evangelist of the time, wrote, This winter of 1857 to 1858 will be remembered as the time when a great revival prevailed.

It swept across the land with such power at the time it was estimated that there were 50,000 people being converted every week. At the same time, across the pond, in Northern Ireland, or in Ireland rather, Four young men began a prayer meeting in a village.

[ 16 : 29 ] That meeting is generally regarded as the beginning of the 1859 revival, Which spread throughout Ireland, Scotland, parts of Wales, and even into England as well.

Whereby around about 100,000 people were converted. It began with prayer. And we can look at other revivals as well. The wonderful revival that took place in Lewis in 1949 and 50.

It began with prayer meeting. Just a couple of people praying and calling on God. Now God is not limited by our prayers. Or by our lack of prayers.

Yet, they're the means he's chosen to work through, to bless his church, and to glorify his name. God can work independently of his people's prayers.

In fact, God must work independently of his people's prayers, or else we would never be saved. God isn't limited. He isn't restricted. Yet, he's ordered things.

[ 17 : 29 ] He's set things out by the example of scripture, and the example of history. That in his own purpose and plans, it is people praying that brings about his work.

So we find it here, in this little book of Judges. Prayer precedes God's blessing. The other thing we see as well, and it's important to notice, I believe, is that prayer preempts the work of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer preempts the work or the giving of the Holy Spirit. Look at verse 9. When they cried to the Lord, He raised up a deliverer, Othniel, son of Canaz, Caleb's younger brother, who saved them.

The Spirit of the Lord came upon him. Now, it wasn't simply that God raised up a deliverer to be a revolutionary leader or a warrior or whatever, but we're told that God sent his Holy Spirit to come upon him and equip him and enable him to be that man that he could not be in and of himself.

When we think about the greatest work that God did in the Old Testament, the exodus, the bringing out of slavery of God's people, we think about the New Testament and the greatest work of God surely was the pouring out of the Spirit of God upon his church on the day of Pentecost when we see that 3,000 were converted in a day.

[ 19 : 10 ] And if we take the day of Pentecost as an example of revival in one sense, and God's blessing and the moving of his Spirit, we see that that was preceded with prayer. Acts chapter 1, verse 14, they all joined together constantly in prayer.

Acts chapter 2, when the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. I don't think it needs to be somebody too brainy to recognize that they were all together in one place and they were praying, perhaps.

I think it's likely. No. Prayer proceeded and preempted the pouring out of the Spirit. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of violent wind came from heaven, filled the whole place.

That wasn't the last time that God sent his Spirit upon his church. Acts chapter 4. Look there for a moment. After God's people, the apostles had been persecuted and told not to preach in the name of Jesus.

They prayed. They prayed, verse 30, Stretch out your hand, Lord. Perform miracles, wonders through the name of your holy servant. After they prayed, the place they were meeting was shaken.

[ 20 : 16 ] They were all filled with the Holy Spirit. What is the great need of the Christian church for today? We need a new songbook.

That's the great need, isn't it? If we had a new songbook, that would make everybody come in, no? If we had more entertaining services, that would be the great need of the church.

If we had this, all that, more money, more manpower, young families. Oh, if we had young families. No.

You know I'm pulling your legs. The greatest need of the church of Jesus Christ, the greatest need, surely, is that we might know more of the Holy Spirit's power and work in us and through us.

We cannot do a thing, can we? We cannot convert a soul. We cannot change a heart. We cannot bring to life those that are dead in their sin. We cannot change a community.

[ 21 : 18 ] We cannot do anything in and of ourselves. It is only the Spirit of God that can do anything in us or through us or by us. Surely the great need, then, as a church here, and the great need as a church nationally and internationally, is that we might know the work of the Holy Spirit.

That's what God has said. That's the principle we find here and throughout Scripture. We have that glorious verse of declaration from God in Zechariah 4, verse 6.

It is not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord. How did you become a Christian and I become a Christian?

The Holy Spirit of God came to us and raised us from life. How is it possible that we can share and witness and live Christian lives? It's the Holy Spirit himself who enables and equips us.

And the wonderful truth is this. Jesus has promised us that when we pray and ask, he will give to us of his Holy Spirit. Luke chapter 11, that wonderful time in which Jesus was talking and sharing about prayer to his disciples.

[ 22 : 29 ] He talks about asking and knocking and seeking. And then he gives this illustration. Luke 11, which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead.

Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion. If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

If those of us who are fathers, though we are fallen and sinful and foolish men, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will our perfect Holy Heavenly Father give to us the Holy Spirit when we ask him?

Here's the promise. Prayer works. How? Because it accomplishes what we cannot do ourselves. Because it brings to bear the Holy Spirit of God into a situation.

That is helpless and hopeless without him. And so even back in the Old Testament, even back there in Judges, even back there when God's people were in a desolate state, spiritually, as far from God as they could be, when everything was bleak, when they were oppressed and overwhelmed by their enemies, when they prayed, God sent his Spirit.

[ 23 : 46 ] And the thing has changed. But notice here as well, finally, thirdly and finally, prayer precedes God's blessing.

Prayer preempts the Holy Spirit's work. And prayer produces action in the church. Verse 10.

The Spirit of the Lord came upon him, that's Othniel, Othniel, so that he became Israel's judge and went to war. Who went to war?

Othniel went to war. But he didn't go by himself, clearly, did he? God's people were raised up to go with him. And in an army, they overpowered and overcame Sear, king of Aram.

God raised up Othniel, the Holy Spirit of God came upon him, became Israel's judge, judge, and God's people acted. Prayer's not a cop-out, you see.

[ 24 : 53 ] Prayer's not an easy, the easy part of Christian service and ministry. Oh, if you can do nothing else, well, at least you can pray. No.

No. Prayer is vital. It's not the soft option. It's not the comfortable thing for the meek and timid. While the brave evangelistic types go out and wage war.

Prayer is hard work. And Paul writes in Colossians in chapter 4, he talks about this wonderful man called Epaphras.

He says of Epaphras, he is always wrestling in prayer for you that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

Prayer is hand-to-hand combat. Prayer is engaging with and wrestling with those things which would overcome us.

[ 25 : 57 ] But, when we pray, God empowers and moves us to act either in prayer or in witness, in life, in testimony.

When we pray for God to do something more often than not, he does something first of all in us. That's why we call revival, revival.

It is the reviving of the spiritual life of the church firstly, which then brings about the resurrection of those who are dead in their sins. The church is changed.

When the church is changed, the world begins to change. When we pray, we often find that we are the answer to our own prayers.

When we ask that God should raise up men and women to serve him and to honour him and to glorify him, often it's those who pray that God chooses to carry out the work.

[ 26 : 59 ] We saw that there, didn't we? Again, back in Acts in chapter 4. Acts in chapter 4, God's people prayed and they asked that God should enable your servants to speak the word with great boldness.

Stretch out your hand and so on. Verse 31, after they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. The ones who had been praying and calling for God to do something and to respond to the animosity of the world were the ones that God came upon and equipped and empowered and spoke through so the church was stirred up and men and women were saved.

All these things, the blessing of God, the sending of the Spirit, the empowering of the church, all begin with prayer. And we've got five opportunities to pray this week, dear friends.

But I want to lay a bit of a challenge upon you and I hope you'll forgive me for it. Only come to a prayer meeting if you believe that God answers prayer.

Only come to the prayer meeting if you yourself feel the need of the Holy Spirit in your life.

[ 28 : 33 ] And only come to the prayer meeting if you are willing to say to the Lord, work in me and use me to accomplish your purposes and answer my prayers.

Dear friends, and I say it again and I hope you'll forgive me. Unless you come and I come believing that God answers prayer, feeling the need of the Holy Spirit and being willing to be the instrument in God's hand to accomplish his purposes, if we do not feel and know those things to be the case, there is no point to us praying.

But, but, let me close again with the words that we closed our service this morning which to me are words which continually challenge and encourage me.

The Ephesians chapter 3. Now to God who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask, that's prayer, or imagine according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations and that must include ours and forever and forever.

Amen. let's sing together as we close. It's a prayer as many of our hymns this evening have been. Prayers it's 398 O breath of life come sweeping through us revive your church with life and power breath of life can cleanse renew us and fit your church to meet this hour.

[ 30 : 23 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.  
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Now may the God of peace who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus that great shepherd of the sheep may he equip you with everything good for doing his will and may he work in us what is pleasing to him through Jesus Christ to whom be the glory now and forever.

Amen. Father I do Skiff herb be your . Oh har Just God sure this is going to be again to walk said for you to be a judge but can use a jam I believe you the love