

03
JUDGES 3:1-11
GOD'S TESTS

opening ILLUSTRATION

For this illustration, try to recruit an adult volunteer who the students know pretty well (if you can't, you can choose a volunteer from your group). Provide your volunteer with a tray filled with a variety of items such as a marker, some coins, a set of keys, a stapler—anything easily identifiable. Explain to students, “This morning, I want to test your ability to observe. I’m going to send ___(name of volunteer)___ around with some items, and then I’m going to give you a quiz on what you see.” Direct the volunteer to slowly walk around and hold the tray with the items for all students to see. Instruct the volunteer to leave the room or get out of sight. Then give each student a piece of paper and pencil and ask questions along the lines of “Was ___ wearing glasses?” “What color were his or her shoes?” “Was ___ wearing any jewelry?” “How tall is ___?” Students will likely moan and groan that they weren’t paying attention to the right things; perfect. Neither were the Israelites.

context

After Jesus’s death and resurrection, He promised His disciples that the Spirit would come in power upon them and they would be His witnesses (see Acts 1:8). That promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:1-4), and Christians today are marked and sealed by the Holy Spirit’s presence. But this was not so in the Old Testament days. Though the Holy Spirit came upon certain people at certain times, He was not a ongoing presence like He has been since Pentecost. Moses and Joshua (Num. 11:25; 27:18) were recorded as having the Holy Spirit on them, and several of the Judges (Othniel, Jephthah, Samson, and Samuel) had His presence, as well.

expository OUTLINE

JUDGES 3:1-4 *God doesn’t remove all challenges from our lives; sometimes He uses them to test us.* Before we get too far into this lesson, let’s notice something: these opening chapters of Judges are very repetitive: the people don’t obey; God sends a test. We’ve seen it before already. But God needed to repeat Himself and His tests because His people kept failing them. God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, had led them to the Promised Land, and had given them success over their enemies; were they really turning their backs on Him? You see, a simple pleasant life might have led them to think they didn’t need God. But constant strife from enemies should have reminded them that He was necessary to their life and well-being. So God left those idolatrous people as a reminder that His people needed His help to know how to fight and how to live.

JUDGES 3:5-7 *It’s easy to fall into a pattern of life that blends in perfectly with the world around us.* You know that the Israelites failed the test when you see the word “But” at the beginning of verse 5. Not only did they not obey God, but they also started to become part of the pagan cultures around them! God’s law to Moses had instructed the Israelites to be set apart from all other nations, and yet here we see them marrying people who didn’t worship the Lord. Not only that, but they “did what was evil” and worshiped false gods (see v. 7). Remember, the command had been to drive the Canaanites out; not only had God’s disobeyed that command, but they were now becoming just like those godless people. God doesn’t want us to conform to the world; instead, we are called to be transformed through our mind so that we can obey the Lord in His good and perfect ways (see Rom. 12:2).

JUDGES 3:8-11 *When we cry out to the Lord, He sends help.* Although the book of Judges will tell over and over again of God sending an enemy to test His people’s faithfulness, we’re also going to see that He always sends someone to bring them back to Him. The land of Aram-naharaim (see v. 8) is in Mesopotamia, hundreds of miles from the Promised Land. So we’re not sure how King Cushan-rishathaim had conquered the Israelites, but after eight years of this, they called out to the Lord for help. Calling out points to admitting you can’t do anything about your situation and begging the Lord to come to your aid. He answered by sending Caleb’s nephew Othniel to guide them. Do you remember Caleb? He and Joshua were the only two spies who weren’t afraid to enter the Promised Land (see Num. 13:30). Othniel led Israel not only to obey the Lord but also into battle. Because of that faithfulness to God, the people lived at peace for forty years.

group DISCUSSION

The following are suggested discussion questions on each section of verses. They can be used for leading a small group session, or in sermon deliveries that include discussion.

ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 3:1-4.

- .01** According to verses 1-2, what lesson did the Israelites in the Promised Land need to learn?
- .02** If God knows everything, why does He give tests? Have you ever been tested in your faith? How did you do?

ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 3:5-7.

- .03** What are some ways that the Israelites began to conform to ungodly standards? How do we sometimes conform to the world rather than to the Lord?
- .04** What was “evil in the Lord’s sight?” How might you be tempted to forget the Lord and worship the things of our culture?

ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 3:9-11.

- .05** What are some far-away powers that we might find ourselves controlled by today? How do we stand up to those?
- .06** Have you ever felt powerless or overwhelmed? Have you ever cried out to the Lord? How does this passage teach you to do it?

session CONNECTION

In Mark 3:20-30, Jesus’s authority and source of power is questioned. His family thought He was insane, and the religious leaders accused Him of being demon possessed or even demonic. Although Jesus powerfully explained the source of His power, He also showed that He wouldn’t force everyone to believe Him. We can see the connection between these verses and Judges 3:1-11; here, God’s people (the Israelites) are tested by God to see if they will believe that He is who He says He is through the Holy Spirit; they certainly do not. Instead, they turn to idols and false gods of their area. But the Holy Spirit falls heavy on Othniel, and he leads the people to obedience. God’s Holy Spirit is necessary for salvation and gives us the power to walk in faith.

application

Remind students of the opening illustration, and say, “I could have told you to pay close attention to the volunteer rather than the items on the tray. But that wouldn’t have really tested your observation, would it?” Explain that God had done the same thing with the Israelites; they found themselves in the Promised Land and decided it was good enough to be there; they didn’t need to really obey God. So the Lord sent the tests and temptations of the surrounding nations to see if the Israelites were really His people. They failed the test miserably. Point to God’s compassion in sending Othniel. Ask, “Who has God sent into your life to help you spiritually? How can you draw closer to that mentor in order to better observe God’s purpose, instructions, and plan for your life?” Challenge students to develop relationships with godly adults and mentors.

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