

JUDGES & ROMANS: RUINED TO RIGHTEOUS

Lesson 5: Ruin of Idolatry

Key Verse: But when the people of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel, who saved them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother...So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died.~Judges 3.9, 11

The term, "dramedy", was first coined by the entertainment industry during the 1980's to describe movies and television show use of both drama and comedy.¹ Once coined, it was discovered that Charlie Chaplin's 1921 film, *The Kid*, was the American entertainment industry's first dramedy. Other popular combinations of drama and comedy include *Jerry Maguire*, *As Good as it Gets*, *M*A*S*H**, *Eight is Enough*, and *The Wonder Years*. The protagonist in these dramedies endures an antagonist, or an antagonizing circumstance, whose resolution deals with hard truths using comedy to highlight the absurdity of the antagonist (or antagonizing circumstance). However, God first used dramedy to highlight the absurdity of **idolatry!** Through His use of protagonists, or His chosen **deliverers**, God uses both comedy and drama to cleverly and surprisingly reveal His power to use *anyone* and *anything* for His purposes and will.

(Psalm 130) Almighty God, You listen to our cries and respond to our misery with compassion. Hallelujah! Merciful Father, You know our sins against You and offer forgiveness. Hallelujah! Our Hope is found in Your steadfast Love and grace-filled redemption. May our time before You in this lesson be an acceptable act of praise and worship of Your Holy Name. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Judges 3.7-31: *in order to provide clarity, we have added the name of the specific judge as they appear in Scripture*

Othniel: **7** And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth. **8** Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia. And the people of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years. **9** But when the people of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel, who saved them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. **10** The Spirit of the LORD was upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand. And his hand prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. **11** So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

Ehud: **12** And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done what was evil in the sight of the LORD. **13** He gathered to himself the Ammonites and the Amalekites, and went and defeated Israel. And they took possession of the city of palms. **14** And the people of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years. **15** Then the people of Israel cried out to the LORD, and the LORD raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud, the son of Gera, the Benjaminite, a left-handed man. The people of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab. **16** And Ehud made for himself a sword with two edges, a cubit in length, and he bound it on his right thigh under his clothes. **17** And he presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab.

Now Eglon was a very fat man. **18** And when Ehud had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who carried the tribute. **19** But he himself turned back at the idols near Gilgal and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." And he commanded, "Silence." And all his attendants went out from his presence. **20** And Ehud came to him as he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber. And Ehud said, "I have a message from God for you." And he arose from his seat. **21** And Ehud reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. **22** And the hilt also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not pull the sword out of his belly; and the dung came out. **23** Then Ehud went out into the porch and closed the doors of the roof chamber behind him and locked them. **24** When he had gone, the servants came, and when they saw that the doors of the roof chamber were locked, they thought, "Surely he is relieving himself in the closet of the cool chamber." **25** And they waited till they were embarrassed. But when he still did not open the doors of the roof chamber, they took the key and opened them, and there lay their lord dead on the floor. **26** Ehud escaped while they delayed, and he passed beyond the idols and escaped to Seirah. **27** When he arrived, he sounded the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim. Then the people of Israel went down with him from the hill country, and he was their leader. **28** And he said to them, "Follow after me, for the LORD has given your enemies the Moabites into your hand." So they went down after him and seized the fords of the Jordan against the Moabites and did not allow anyone to pass over. **29** And they killed at that time about 10,000 of the Moabites, all strong, able-bodied men; not a man escaped. **30** So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for eighty years.

Shamgar: **31** After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed 600 of the Philistines with an oxgoad, and he also saved Israel.

Diamonds: After two chapters of a bird's-eye overview of the pattern of God's people's progressive rebellion, now we enter

¹[Wikipedia, Dramedy](#)

God's history lessons. As a reminder, the events we study from Judges 3.7 to Judges 21 cover hundreds of years of Israel's history. While we read them as consecutive events, in reality, we are time traveling at the speed of light! Now it's time to buckle up!

Our first dramedy is the brief story of Othniel's time as a judge, or military deliverer. The author's use of rhythm to emphasize the nature of the "king of Mesopotamia" (V 8, 10) moves this story from a boring history lesson to one that uses comedy amid drama. His being described as "king of Mesopotamia" is as incredibly generic to geography as saying he was king of North America (would he be king of Mexico, the United States, or Canada, or all?!?!?). Notice "Cushan-rishathaim" is repeated *four* times in only *two* verses (V 8, 10)! This playful use of rhythm emphasizes his wickedness as if saying he was wicked – I mean really wicked, like really, really wicked – so wicked that he is the most wicked of *all* the wicked! The author's focus on his name indicates his extreme wickedness while the playful storytelling celebrates God's triumph over the enemies of His people. This is about as close as the author could get to creating a Hebrew rap tribute celebrating God's power over the wicked of the most wicked anywhere in the universe! After eight years of crushing servitude (V 8), God's people "cried out to the LORD" (V 9). This was not an act of repentance but instead likened to a cry for help because of misery and severe pain and distress.²

1. What does the author tell us about Othniel in Judges 3.7-11?

Othniel's death is the end of an era (V 11b). Othniel's tie to Caleb (Othniel's uncle, V 9) plus the forty years of rest provided by his service as God's deliverer (V 11), was the final bridge to the first-hand accounts of the generation who had spent forty years wandering in the wilderness for their rebellion against God. Othniel is considered the last of God's deliverers whose pedigree, godly obedience (married an Israelite woman, Achsah – Judges 1.12-13), and divine appointing (V 10) qualified him as a model judge. However, Dr. Davis reminds us, "Yahweh...is the Lord of history".³

2. List three character traits about God's next deliverer, Ehud⁴, that "break the mold" set by Othniel (Judges 3.15-30):

The story of Ehud as a dramedy is discovered in the author's emphasis on the fatness and strength of king Eglon and his warriors (V 17, 22, 29). To clarify, verse 29 is directly translated as "all fat and all men of war".⁵ Irony is employed in noting that Israel's required tributes (large collections of produce) are the source of both king Eglon and his warriors' fatness and strength (V 15,17-18)! The source of what makes the Moabites fat and strong, Israel, is also the source of what will kill them. As such this truth makes king Eglon's gruesome death even more embarrassing and humiliating!

3. God's response to His people's rebellion was to strengthen king Eglon and the Moabites (V 12). What does God teach you about Himself in using the hardship He purposed against His people (strengthening the Moabites through the tributes) to also deliver His people? In other words, God converts His discipline strategy from pain-filled hardship for His people to deliverance for His people. What does this teach you about God?

Shamgar's intrigue is found in all that we do not know about him (V 31)! From his name alone we know that it is unlikely that

²Davis, pp. 49-50

³Davis, p. 53

⁴Ehud's left-handed-ness may have indicated a physical injury/malformation to his right hand, or that he specifically trained to be a left-handed warrior since this would have made him a surprising and skilled assassin (1 Chronicles 12.2)~Van Pelt, p 549

⁵Van Pelt, p. 551

he was an Israelite. In addition, it is not clear in the original text if he worshipped a Canaanite goddess named Anath, or that his mother was Anath (because “Anath” is feminine), or if he was a resident of one of two towns in that period ending with “-anath”.⁶

Shamgar’s story as a dramedy is developed in his superior command of an “oxgoad”. An oxgoad is a multi-purpose tool used by agrarian societies to prod oxen while plowing fields. It is described as about eight feet long with a circular shape that enlarges at one end to six inches round. The smaller end has a sharp nail or spike used to prod the oxen, while the larger end has a spade or flat, iron paddle used to clean the plow while plowing. In addition, though we have only one sentence about him in verse 31, theologians surmise that he was “a legend in his own time” because he is referenced in Deborah’s celebratory poem in Judges 5.5.⁷ Of course, Shamgar was a legend: he used a sharp, long stick with a flat end to kill 600 Philistines (and likely over years and years)!

4. From what we know about Shamgar, how does he too “break the mold” set by Othniel?

Shamgar is considered a “minor judge”. The story of the time of the minor judges as judges is smaller (or minor) when compared to judges whose stories include significantly more detail. In addition, their account doesn’t fit the pattern of the judges whose accounts include the pattern of the “an opening formula, a statement of the people’s idolatry, the LORD’S anger, and Israel’s subjugation by the enemy.”⁸ One of the most significant details of Shamgar’s story is his defeat of the Philistines. We learn in Judges 2.21-23 that God used the Philistines’ iron chariots to test His people’s obedience and fidelity to Him. Soon, we will see Him defeat them using an unlikely pair: Deborah and Barak (Judges 4-5). In addition, the timeline of history reveals that Shamgar secured the eighty-year rest provided by Ehud by preventing Philistine incursions through the Judean foothills.⁹ In Judges 10.11, God provides us a final detail of His deliverance through Shamgar (implied).¹⁰

5. God reveals something amazing about Himself in the use of those who both “fit the mold” and “break the mold”. What is God teaching you about Himself in this? How is God calling you to serve Him regardless of whether you “fit the mold”?

Deity: Deliverer¹¹~ (Judges 3.9) “A deliverer is one who rescues from danger. Two of the judges [in the Bible], Othniel and Ehud (Judges 3.9, 15), are called deliverers in the sense of military heroes. More often God is spoken of as the Deliverer of His people (2 Samuel 22.2; Psalm 18.2; 40.17; 144.2). The picture of God as deliverer is paralleled with the images of a rock, fortress, helper, and strong tower. Acts 7.35 refers to Moses as a deliverer. Romans 11.26-27 refers to the Messianic King as the Deliverer Who will take away Israel’s sin [Paul is referencing Isaiah 27.9 and 59.20-21].

“The verb ‘deliver’ is used in a wide range of contexts. According to Job 5.19-26, God delivers in seven ways: from famine, war, the scourge of the tongue, wild animals, to safety, abundant offspring, and long life. Scripture also speaks to deliverance from sins (Psalm 39.8; 79.9); the way of evil (Proverbs 2.12); the power of evil (Matthew 6.13; Galatians 1.4; Colossians 1.13); the law (Romans 7.6); the body of death (Romans 7.24-25); and the coming wrath of God (1

⁶Davis, pp. 55-56 & Webb, p. 89

⁷Davis, p. 66, quoting R.K. Harrison by footnote

⁸Van Pelt, p. 513 footnote

⁹Webb, pp. 90 & 92

¹⁰Webb, p. 90

¹¹Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, p. 411

Thessalonians 1.10). God is the agent of deliverance in Colossians 1.13 and Romans 7.24-25. Christ is the agent in 1 Thessalonians 1.10 and Galatians 1.4, where He brings deliverance by giving Himself for sins.”

Once God delivers His people from despotic rulers in Judges, He provides the land rest. This is different from the eternal rest His people now have through Christ¹². During the rest provided in Judges, the people were able to live in security from warring enemies, build homes, and develop the land for both produce and livestock. All of these can be summed up as being delivered from the threat of death to hope in life.

6. How do the final four verses in this definition of God as our Deliverer help you understand the deliverance God has provided for you in Christ? (Colossians 1.13, Romans 7.24-25, 1 Thessalonians 1.10, Galatians 1.4)

7. What rest does God’s deliverance in Christ provide you today?

Doctrine: Idolatry¹³~ (Judges 3.7) “Sin is not only a physical act of rebellion against God, such as lying or stealing, but it is also a matter of the heart. The physical displays of sin are the fruit of what has been birthing in the heart of a person (Matthew 15.10-20).

8. How is Romans 2.29 a great comfort and source of rest despite the truth of the definition of idolatry?

“In scripture, idolatry usually refers to bowing down to a statue made of wood or gold, worshipping created things instead of the Creator. But idolatry can take more subtle forms: a seeking of approval, security, power, pleasure, etc. We can diagnose the idolatry of our heart by examining the areas where the desires of our heart have turned into idolatrous demands (James 4.1-4).”

9. Pray privately, asking God to reveal “the areas where the desires of [your] heart have turned into idolatrous demands” (James 4.1-2). Next, use any of the following verses to give you great assurance and comfort in the forgiveness of your idolatry provided in Christ: Psalm 130; Romans 8.1-2; Romans 8.15-16; Romans 8.31-39; Ephesians 1.13-14; Colossians 1.13-14; Hebrews 10.19-23. Share the verse that provided you great assurance and comfort that in Christ, your sins are forgiven.

Your Scripture-Soaked Prayer:

¹²Davis, p. 54 & Webb, pp. 72-73

¹³The Gospel Project, *The 99 Essential Doctrines: #40 Sin as Idolatry*, Lifeway Christian Resources (2018)

Lecture Outline:

Aim: God uses His people as instruments to advance His glory.

- I. Filled Instrument (3.7-11) **T1:** Instruments for God's glory must be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and obedient to His will.
 - a. In what specific ways is God using you as an instrument for His glory?
 - b. How are you walking in obedience to His will for your life?
- II. Flawed Instruments (3.12-31) **T2:** Instruments for God's glory surrender every strength and weakness for His use.
 - a. How is God using you for His glory?
 - b. What excuses are you making to avoid surrendering your life to the glory of God?
 - c. Which weaknesses are keeping you from doing what God has called you to do?

Davis, Dale Ralph, *Judges: Such a Great Salvation* (Great Britain: Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, 2000) pp. 47-67

Schneider, Tammi J., *Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry* (Collegiville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2000) pp. 37-58

Van Pelt, Miles V., *Judges: ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2021) pp. 544-552

Webb, Barry G., *Judges and Ruth: God in Chaos* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2015) pp. 65-92