**INTRODUCTION**

**The “cycle of sin” which was described in Chapter 2 is now set in motion in Chapter 3. Recall that Israel made the fatal mistake of *compromising* and *cohabiting* with the Canaanite peoples of the land. God had rightfully judged and condemned these people because of their sinful lifestyles and religions (see Leviticus Chapter 18 and Romans 1:18-32). Yet, the Israelites CHOSE to allow the Canaanites to live with them in the land, in disobedience to God’s clear commandments (Deuteronomy Chapter 7).**

**The “Wilderness Generation” did not stray from the worship of God, even in the presence of their Canaanite neighbors; they “knew too much about Him” – they were eyewitnesses to God’s power, protection, and provision in their long and difficult journey through the deserts of Sinai. They had seen God part the Red Sea. They had tasted manna, the bread from Heaven; they had quenched their thirst with water from the Rock (Psalm 78:12-28). They followed the pillar of cloud as it led them along the way. They had rested securely in its light at night. Their memory of slavery in Egypt was fresh; some may have borne the scars to prove it. Nothing could turn them away from the powerful and loving God who gave them freedom!**

**The same could not be said of the “Wealthy Generation” – their children, who had been born in the Promised Land. They grew up in comfortable houses; they ate the finest food and sipped the sweetest wine; they drank cool water from deep wells. They were dressed in the finest designer clothes. They lounged in the shade on warm summer evenings. Sadly, in their prosperity, they forgot the very God who had given these things to them. The heartfelt gratitude of their departed elders was replaced with a sense of entitlement, arrogance, and self-sufficiency. This “attitude of ingratitude” contributed to their eventual downfall (See Deuteronomy 8:7-20; Deuteronomy 32:9-18).**

**Chapter 3 describes their descent into idolatry and God’s angry response. Yet, even in His anger, God had a plan to deliver and strengthen His people. We will meet the first three of the judges of Israel in this chapter.**

1. **Read verses 1-4. Who were the nations (or peoples) that the Lord left in the Promised Land? Which of them were “newcomers”? (v. 3)**
2. **What was God’s PURPOSE in leaving these enemies in the Promised Land? Could this also be a reason why the Lord permits our spiritual enemy (Satan) to fight against the church? (v.2, 4; see Ephesians 6:10-12; II Corinthians 10:3-6; I Peter 2:11; 5:8)**
3. **Read verses 5-8. What were the TWO consequences of Israel’s decision to cohabit with the Canaanite people? (v. 5-6; see also Romans 12:1-2; I Corinthians 15:33-34; II Corinthians 6:14-18)**
4. **What was the attitude of the backslidden Israelites towards God? What did they do instead? (v. 7 Note – the word translated “groves” in the KJV is Asherah, the name of a Phoenician goddess, and her image)**
5. **What was the Lord’s response to the unfaithfulness and disobedience of His people? Who was the first oppressor that God raised against Israel, and for how long? (See Proverbs 1:24-33; Isaiah 59:1-3; Romans 1:18-32)**
6. **Read verses 9-11. What effect did the oppression have on the Israelites? What does this tell us about human nature in general and God’s covenant people in particular? Do you feel that the church is better (more faithful and obedient) than Israel? Why or why not? (v. 9; see also Hosea 5:15; Jude 1:3-4; II Peter 2:1-3; Revelation 2:12-23)**
7. **How did God respond to the “cries” of His people? (v. 9) Answer: The Lord responded by raising up a , whose name was .**
8. **What “help” did Israel’s first judge receive from God? What does this tell us about ANYTHING that God calls us to do? (v.10; see also Genesis 41:25-40; Acts 1:8)**
9. **What did the land of Israel experience after Othniel’s victory over the armies of Chushanrishathaim, and for how long? (v. 11) Is there anything that today’s church can learn from this?**
10. **Read verses 12-14. What did the nation of Israel do after the death of Othniel? (v. 12)**
11. **Who did God “raise up” as a consequence, and what did he do? (v.12-13).**
12. **How long was Israel oppressed THIS time? (v. 14)**
13. **Who did God raise up in response to their cries? What was unusual about him, and how did he gain access to the king of Moab? (v. 15)**
14. **Read verses 16-26. What does this passage tell us about Ehud? What might we call him today?**
15. **Read verses 27-30. What did Ehud do after his successful assassination of King Eglon? (v. 27) What does this tell us about him?**
16. **How long did the land have rest after Ehud’s victory over Moab? (v. 30)**
17. **Who did God raise up along with Ehud? (v. 31)**
18. **Who did he defeat, and by what means? What can we learn from this?**

**CONCLUSION**

**Chapter 2 of the Book of Judges provided an overview of the entire period of the Judges. Chapter 3 (and all subsequent chapters) gives us specifics. In this chapter the nation of Israel begins its “cycle of sin”. After the passing away of the “Wilderness Generation”, another generation came up. Unlike their forefathers, they “did not know the Lord” (Judges 2:10). They knew ABOUT the Lord – their parents and grandparents had told them of God’s miracles in Egypt and the wilderness (Judges 6:13). However, they had not yet had a personal experience with God; they didn’t “know him for themselves”. This lack of a personal knowledge of God proved fatal to the practice of their faith. The sensual pleasures associated with the worship of Baal and Ashtoreth were more attractive, and the Israelites cemented their relationship with these idols by intermarrying with the Canaanites (Judges 3:5-7)**

**This choice brought painful consequences. True to His Word, God stirred up enemies against Israel who oppressed and exploited them, until they cried out to God for mercy and deliverance. The Lord, out of love and compassion for His covenant-breaking people, raised up deliverers, called judges, to help them break free of their spiritual addiction to idol worship and break the power of the oppressors.**

**Three judges were covered in Chapter 3: Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar. We can already see that God called different kinds of people to be judges over Israel. Othniel had a good pedigree – he was Caleb’s nephew and had proven himself a capable warrior. Ehud had some political influence (as part of the Israelite tribute delegation to King Eglon of Moab). On the other hand, Shamgar is a complete unknown whose only weapon was a farmer’s implement – an oxgoad! But with God’s power, he used it to defeat the Philistine army.**

**Chapter 4 introduces us to one of the major judges of Israel: a remarkable woman named Deborah. In a patriarchal society like Israel, she stands out as a prophet, judge, and leader. She also leaves us with a glorious psalm of praise that gives a rare woman’s perspective on the events of her day.**