Lesson 3: Unlikely Deliverers

Teaching Outline — Mercy that gives God all the glory
Passage: Judges 3:1-31 | **Suggested teaching time:** 45 minutes

Lesson objective

- Class will understand:
  - God mercifully delivers Israel through unlikely instruments
  - God deserves all glory

Opening and background (0:00-0:04)

From explanation to example

- Judges 3 moves from the cycle's explanation to its first three examples
  - Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar
- Different length and detail; same central point
  - Israel cannot save itself
  - The Lord raises deliverers
  - He equips them as He chooses
  - He gives relief to a people who have done evil in His sight

Comparing the three stories

- Othniel: concise and orderly
- Ehud: extended, surprising, full of narrative detail
- Shamgar: a single verse
- The same Lord is at work in each — don't assign different gods to different episodes
- The variation displays His freedom
  - Not dependent on one kind of leader, one method, or one measure of public recognition

The setting

- Israel is living among peoples whose worship and practices press against covenant faithfulness

- The danger isn't lack of information about the Lord's command
- The nations prove whether Israel will hearken to the commandments given through Moses
  - The test reveals allegiance
  - It doesn't make obedience impossible or remove responsibility

Nations left to prove Israel (3:1-6)

- "Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them." (3:1)
- "And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the LORD." (3:4)
- The nations didn't force disobedience
  - Their presence was the setting in which obedience was tested
  - The nations left in the land were to [BLANK: prove] Israel
- The outcome: "And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons: and served their gods." (3:6)
  - Forbidden accommodation; served idols
  - The failures of Judges 1-2 bear bitter fruit
  - Compromise never remains neatly contained

Two opposite errors

1. Making human agents the heroes in a way the text does not
2. Being embarrassed that God uses flawed and unexpected people

- The Lord's choice of instruments is part of the message
  - The Lord alone accomplishes [BLANK: salvation]

"Salvation belongs to the Lord" — a needed balance

- Doesn't deny human action
  - Othniel judges and goes to war
  - Ehud plans and acts
  - Shamgar uses an ox goad
- Their actions aren't independent alternatives to God's saving work
- God works through human instruments without surrendering His glory
  - His ordinary way in Scripture and in the church
  - We pray, teach, give, speak, serve, persevere — fruit belongs to God

> **Teacher note — safeguard before Ehud:** State clearly before discussing Ehud:
>
> - The passage records God's deliverance in Israel's covenant history
> - It does not instruct Christians to imitate violence, deception, or assassination
> - This lets the class hear the passage seriously without turning its difficult details into entertainment or a pattern for conduct

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Read Judges 3:1-15 (0:04-0:09)

- **Read aloud**

Exposition of Judges 3:1-15 (0:09-0:17)

Othniel and the Spirit of the Lord (3:7-11)

A compact, clear first cycle

- "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgat the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves" (v. 7)
  - Forgetfulness produces false service
- The Lord's anger is kindled
- He sells Israel to Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia for eight years (v. 8)

The mercy of God appears

- "And when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother" (v. 9)
- The decisive explanation: the Lord raised a deliverer
  - Othniel delivered because the Lord raised him

Not pedigree

- Not an unknown outsider — met in ch. 1 with Caleb and Kirjath-sepher
- Establishes courage and family connection

- Judges 3 refuses to make pedigree the explanation
  - The explanation: the Lord's raising and the Spirit's coming upon him
- Even evident ability and a faithful history need God's empowering presence

Eight years of oppression

- Not given to invite speculation — trouble is real and prolonged
- Can make a people feel their condition is normal or irreversible
- The duration doesn't limit the Lord
- Bring longstanding trouble to God
  - Delay doesn't mean indifference
  - His timing is wise; His power isn't reduced by the length of our need

Othniel's empowerment (v. 10)

- "And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushanrishathaim."
- The Lord's Spirit comes upon him; the Lord delivers the enemy
- Don't admire natural ability detached from God
- The [BLANK: Spirit] of the LORD came upon Othniel

Forty years of rest — then Othniel dies

- A relatively straightforward judge, yet temporary
- Prepares us to see no merely human deliverer can secure lasting faithfulness
- Rest is a gift, not proof the heart is permanently cured
  - External peace is valuable — thank God for stability
  - Peace in the land can't create faithfulness in the heart
  - The people again do evil after his death
  - Circumstances can restrain sin for a time
  - Only saving grace gives a new heart and sustains true allegiance

Grateful for leaders, not substituting them

- A godly leader can teach, protect, encourage, and model courage
- No pastor, parent, or mentor can be the source of another's faith
- If obedience lasts only while a leader is near, we've attached ourselves to a human support rather than the Lord

For the believer

- Spiritual fruit is not self-generated
- We're responsible to obey, serve, and act courageously
- Gifts, insight, and resolve aren't the source of victory
- "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zech 4:6)
- Victory does not come by human [BLANK: power]

Ehud, raised by God (3:12-15)

Evil again

- "And the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD" (v. 12)
- Eglon gathers Ammon and Amalek, smites Israel, possesses "the city of palm trees" (v. 13)
- Israel serves Eglon eighteen years

The Lord raised him up

- "when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded" (v. 15)
- The handedness is significant to the means of his mission
- But the first and governing fact: the Lord raised him up

A surprising description

- Benjamin = "son of the right hand"; Ehud is lefthanded
- Don't build doctrine on a detail the text doesn't explain
- It contributes to the story's surprise
  - What might be overlooked becomes part of God's means of deliverance
- Unusual traits aren't automatic signs of divine favor
- God isn't restricted by the expectations through which people rank usefulness

Humbles the impressive and the unqualified

- Ability, education, experience, and public confidence may be useful — none compels God's blessing
- Ordinary background, limitation, or lack of notice doesn't put someone outside God's service
- The faithful question
  - Not "Do I look like the kind of person God uses?"

- “Will I obey the duty He has placed before me and give Him the glory?”

Two unhelpful responses to weakness

- **Self-pity:** “Because I lack this, I cannot serve at all.”
- **Self-promotion:** “Because I have this, God must need me.”
- Both keep the focus on self
- The Lord calls us to:
  - Receive strengths with gratitude
  - Acknowledge limitations honestly
  - Seek needed training
  - Serve faithfully without resting identity on being impressive

The dignity of ordinary preparation

- Dependence on God is no excuse for carelessness
  - A teacher studies
  - A parent learns to communicate
  - A worker is diligent
  - A witness seeks to understand the gospel clearly
- We prepare because duties matter and love seeks others’ good
- Preparation doesn’t replace prayer or give grounds for boasting
- Do the work; look to the Lord for fruit

God doesn’t wait for an impressive instrument

- Free to use the person, capacity, situation, and means that best display His wisdom
- “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.” (1 Cor 1:27)
- This doesn’t demean those God uses
  - It removes boasting
  - God works so that He receives the [BLANK: glory]

Read Judges 3:16-31 (0:17-0:22)

- **Read aloud**

Exposition of Judges 3:16-31 (0:22-0:31)

Ehud’s dangerous deliverance (3:16-30)

The account

- A violent act in a violent period
- Ehud makes “a dagger which had two edges, of a cubit length”; girds it beneath his raiment on his right thigh (v. 16)
- Brings the tribute to Eglon
- Sends the carriers away
- Returns from the quarries near Gilgal: “I have a secret errand unto thee, O king” (v. 19)
- In the private chamber: “I have a message from God unto thee” (v. 20), and strikes Eglon

Neither soften nor sensationalize

- A descriptive account — not a personal command or Christian model for violence, deception, or political assassination
- It tells what happened within God’s judgment on Moab and deliverance of Israel
- It doesn’t remove New Testament commands governing the church
  - Love for enemies
  - Submission to lawful authority

Description vs. prescription

- Essential when teaching historical narrative
- Scripture records events without approving every feature of the people involved
- The question
  - Not “Can I find someone in the Bible who did this?”
  - “What does this passage say God was doing, and what commands has He given His people?”
- Interpret Judges in light of the whole canon, under the teaching of Christ and His apostles

Still confronted with God’s holiness

- Moab’s oppression isn’t outside His sight
- Israel’s long bondage doesn’t put them outside His power
- The decisive actor is the Lord
- The violence belongs to a unique period and must not be copied
- Its testimony to God’s righteous rule must not be edited away

The announcement (v. 28)

- Ehud escapes while the servants delay, reaches Seirath, blows a trumpet in mount Ephraim
- “Follow after me: for the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand”
- He doesn’t say “I have delivered”
    - Ehud said that the LORD had [BLANK: delivered] Israel’s enemies

Victory and rest

- Israel takes the fords of Jordan toward Moab
- About ten thousand men of Moab, “all lusty, and all men of valour; and there escaped not a man” (v. 29)
- “So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest fourscore years” (v. 30)
- Longer than Othniel’s rest, still not permanent
- The deepest problem isn’t one foreign king but the sinful heart of Israel

Warning and comfort

- **Warning:** don’t read God only through categories that flatter us — He is holy and judges evil
- **Comfort:** settled, long-standing oppression isn’t beyond His power
    - Long oppression does not exhaust God’s [BLANK: mercy]
    - Eighteen years didn’t limit His ability to deliver

Don’t idolize a successful season

- Eighty years of rest, then a return to evil
- Longer relief is still not final salvation
- Fewer crises don’t automatically mean deeper faith
- Peace should lead to gratitude, worship, and renewed obedience
- If it leads to self-sufficiency, it becomes another test of the heart

Personal victories

- Overcome temptation, a restored relationship, provision through a hard season
- Give thanks and remain watchful
- A past deliverance testifies to God’s faithfulness — not a reason to stop depending on Him
- A favorable circumstance can’t keep a heart faithful without continuing trust

Shamgar and an ox goad (3:31)

One verse

- “And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel.”
- No biography, no call, no record of years of rest
- Don’t pretend to know details God hasn’t given

The verse tells us enough

- An ox goad against six hundred Philistines
- God may use what appears ordinary, inadequate, or unimpressive
- “and he also delivered Israel” — the essential final words
  - Recognized as deliverance for God’s people
  - The book’s theology keeps us from glorifying the instrument above the Deliverer

The contrast and the restraint

- A practical farm implement — ordinary labor, not royal power or military equipment
- A tool for directing an animal becomes the means of resisting a powerful enemy
- No tactics, no speech, no invitation to reconstruct the event
- The brevity teaches restraint
  - Honor what God said without inventing a biography to make the servant more impressive

Comfort for uncelebrated work

- Scripture gives more space to some servants than others; God sees and uses both
- A quiet act of faithfulness may have no public story
- The Lord doesn’t measure usefulness by attention received
- He calls His servants to faithfulness in the place He assigns

Not a slogan

- Don’t reduce Shamgar to “do great things with whatever is nearby”
- Not a promise every available object becomes a dramatic instrument
- Not a call to pursue danger to demonstrate faith
- God can work through a servant and means the world wouldn’t rank highly
- Our responsibility: faithful obedience
- Results, scale, and visibility: His

Become available

- Don’t wait to become impressive before you become available
- May feel ordinary, unseen, inexperienced, poorly equipped
- Proper response: not self-contempt or self-confidence, but humble obedience
  - What has God placed in your hand?
  - What duty has He plainly assigned?
  - Use it faithfully, trusting Him for the outcome
- God calls His servants to be [BLANK: available] to Him
- No promise of dramatic results; no guarantee that an ordinary tool brings victory
  - A call to trust the God who isn’t restricted by our apparent lack
  - He is wise, strong, and free
  - His glory does not require our greatness

Application: Serving without taking credit (0:31-0:38; with Christ and the gospel)

1. **Confess the recurring need for deliverance**
   - We can’t rescue ourselves from sin or reform our way into reconciliation
   - First step: not self-improvement, but honest repentance and faith in God’s provided Savior
2. **Act in dependence**
   - Othniel went to war; Ehud acted with courage; Shamgar used what was in his hand
   - God’s sovereignty doesn’t produce passivity
     - It produces obedient action that refuses self-congratulation
   - Pray, prepare, serve, speak truth, resist temptation — then give the Lord the praise
   - We act in grateful [BLANK: obedience], not self-reliance
3. **Resist the demand to be remarkable**
   - The kingdom needs no self-made celebrities
   - It needs servants who know gifts are received and strength is supplied
     - The teacher who prepares faithfully
     - The parent who prays patiently
     - The member who encourages quietly
     - The witness who speaks of Christ plainly

- How we evaluate service
  - We compare by visibility: platform = important; hidden care = small; ordinary duties = delay before “real ministry”
  - Judges 3 corrects that — all three belong within God’s work of deliverance
  - Faithfulness: receiving gifts humbly and obeying where He placed us, not matching someone else’s assignment
- This can reshape a week
  - Caring for a child, visiting a lonely neighbor, honest work, preparing a lesson, praying in secret
  - He asks us to love Him and neighbor in the actual responsibilities entrusted to us
  - Desire for a larger platform can become discontent if it keeps us from the duty in our hands

4. **Test the desire for recognition**
   - When a task succeeds, do we announce our skill?
   - When unnoticed, do we resent it?
   - The gospel frees us to work heartily — the Lord sees, and all [BLANK: honor] belongs to the Lord
   - “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (1 Cor 1:31)
5. **Keep the TO/FOR distinction in view**
   - We don’t serve **for** a place in God’s family — Christ secures that for all who trust Him
   - We serve **to** honor the Father who already showed us mercy in His Son
   - Service offered to purchase acceptance becomes bondage
   - Service from acceptance becomes grateful [BLANK: worship]
   - Liberating when service seems fruitless
     - For approval → resentment or despair
     - From acceptance → can grieve a hard result without feeling worthless
     - The Lord sees what’s done in faith; He decides scale and outcome and receives the praise
   - Liberating when another receives greater notice
     - God’s glory isn’t a limited resource to protect
     - When Christ is honored through another, rejoice rather than compete
     - Doesn’t eliminate honest evaluation, correction, or stewardship
     - Removes the poison of envy
     - One who knows salvation belongs to the Lord celebrates His work wherever it appears

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Christ and the gospel (0:31-0:38; with application)

The final and sufficient Deliverer

- The judges deliver for a time
  - Othniel dies
  - Ehud dies
  - Shamgar's story ends in one verse
  - The people return to sin
- Jesus died for sinners, rose bodily, and "ever liveth to make intercession" (Heb 7:25)

More than removing an oppressor

- He bore the penalty of sin
- The Father "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col 1:13)
- At the cross, Christ took what we deserved
- In His resurrection, He broke death's claim
- He alone can forgive the guilty and give new hearts

The greater surprise

- Surprising deliverers prepare us for the surprise of the gospel
- Salvation comes not through self-exaltation but through the crucified and risen Christ
  - "But we preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1:23)
- No believer may boast in self
  - Bring our weakness, receive grace by faith, give Him all the glory
- Jesus [BLANK: Christ] is the final and sufficient Deliverer

Greater, sinless, and final

- He needs no deliverance from His own rebellion
- He willingly lays down His life, bears sin's penalty, rises in victory, reigns forever
- Judges: temporary relief from earthly oppressors
- Christ: reconciles guilty people to God and gives eternal life
- Our confidence is not in an impressive human rescuer, but the living Savior God provided

Discussion (0:38-0:43)

Discussion questions

1. What does Judges 3:1-4 say the nations left in the land were meant to prove?
2. What repeated phrases show that God, not the judge, is the ultimate Deliverer?
3. Why must we read Ehud's account as description rather than a model for Christian conduct?
4. How does Shamgar encourage humble availability without promising dramatic outcomes?
5. Where are you tempted to seek credit instead of giving God the glory?

Closing prayer (0:43-0:45)

> **Closing prayer:** "Lord God, Thou art our Deliverer. Forgive us for trusting our strength, seeking our own honor, and forgetting that salvation belongs to Thee. Thank Thee for raising up Jesus Christ, the living Savior who delivers from sin and death. Make us humble, available, and obedient servants. Use what Thou hast placed in our hands, and receive all glory for every good work. In Jesus' name, Amen."