

“Southpaw Savior” // Judges 2:18–3:31 // Broken Savivors #3

Introduction

How many lefties in here? If **Obama, George HW Bush, Reagan and Clinton** were in here, their hands would all be raised.

Several of our pastors got into a big discussion the other day as to whether it was an advantage or disadvantage to be left-handed:

One guy on our team, who is a lefty, says the disadvantages are obvious: “We live in a right hand world.”

- “As a kid, when you **learn to write**, I was always smearing ink across the page.
- Most **scissors feel really awkward** in your hand, and good luck finding a **golf club** that works.
- Or things you **right-handed people** just take for granted...
 - He said, “When I hold my **playing cards** I can’t see the numbers.” **LOAF OF BREAD**. MULTIPLE CHOICE.
 - Or ZIPPERS: that’s right, most pants zippers have a flap that makes it almost impossible to zip or unzip with the left hand. Bet you right-ies never think about that.” **BITTERNESS**

Advantages maybe not AS obvious...

- But lefties are more likely to be **geniuses**... Statistically, you have a greater chance of having an IQ over 140 if you are a [lefty](#). What’s the correlation? No one knows.
- SPORTS: In most sports, opponents aren’t used to the movements a southpaw brings. It introduces an **element of surprise**.
 - **Seeing underwater**. [Not kidding](#). I also have no idea why, but left-handers can see much better underwater. So, if you are going to play underwater hide and seek, choose a lefty.

Throughout history, left-handedness has definitely been considered a weakness—It ranges from the comical to the cruel.

- The Latin word for left is *sinister*, which also means “evil.”
- The French word for left is *gauche* (*goash*), which means “awkward.”
- Even the English word *left* comes from an Old English word that means “weak.”
- Me in SE Asia: Jangan kiri.¹

Left-handedness, believe it or not, plays an important role in teaching us how God works in the world. **One of Israel’s first judges** was a southpaw. His name was **Ehud** (ay-hude).

¹ Also, growing up, I remember calling people to skateboarded left-foot, “skatin’ goofy.”

Judges 3 (Bibles)

But before I get to his story, I want to show you a little phrase the author uses to setup these stories, because it shows you the kinds of things God wants you to learn from them

[3:1] Now these are the nations that the LORD left, to test Israel by them, that is, all in Israel who had not experienced all the wars in Canaan. [2] It was in order that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, to teach war to those who had not known it before.

- What is the answer to the question:** “Why did God left pockets of Canaanites in the Promised Land?” Well, **in one sense it is because** that 1st generation of Israelites had **not believed God** enough to drive them out—we saw that last week. **But did you see a couple of other reasons in there, too?** Vs. 1: “He left these nations in to test them... vs. 2: “It was in order that new generations might learn to fight wars in God’s strength.”
- Imagine you were an Israelite child, and you had just gotten back from Sunday School (Sabbath), and that day you had learned about God’s promise to give Israel the Promised Land of Canaan. But you know there are pockets of Canaanites left everywhere, and so you say, “Dad, why are all these unbelieving people left in our land? Didn’t God give this land to us?” Your dad said, “Because of the sin our parents.” But you respond, “But dad... that’s not our fault; their sin is not our sin. So, after they died, why didn’t God just drive them out for us through swarms of tracker jackers or a herd of wild billy goats or something?”
 - **The answer:** To test us... to see if we would believe God, and to teach us to trust him to fight for us.

Let me ask you: Do you ever wonder why God doesn’t just cure us of sin? Why not go ahead and give us heaven now (pain-free, sin-free)?

- In part, he wants us to learn to struggle against these things in his strength. To teach us to rely on his grace, not on our flesh.
 - (~~I’m not saying “every instance of pain has a lesson in it that you need to learn or God won’t release you from it;” I’m saying that is one of the things God is using pain and temptation for in our lives.~~)
- The Apostle Paul said God leaves trials and weaknesses in our lives to keep us humble.
 - Sometimes God will allow you to struggle with a lesser sin, to keep you from a bigger one, pride. If you were immediately cured from sin, you’d get proud.
 - *Newton: But what it has done, made me more deeply away of my need for grace, and I suppose that is spiritual growth: Spiritual growth is primarily growth in my knowledge of my need for grace. AND IF GOD USES CONTINUAL STRUGGLE AND SIN IN THIS LIFE TO PRODUCE THAT IN YOU, IT’S A GOOD THING...*
 - **ARE YOU LIKE THAT? Illus. Rick and journaling...**
 - **He does that to humble you...**
 - *My marriage.*

So, the story of this Judge, and every Judge, is (in part) to teach you how to fight the fight of faith!

Ehud

¹²Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and because they did this evil the LORD gave Eglon king of Moab power over Israel. Eglon was a bad man. His name just sounds bad, doesn't it? EGG-LON. For 18 years he raped, pillaged, and murdered the Israelites.

¹⁵Again the Israelites cried out to the LORD, and he gave them a deliverer—Ehud, a left-handed man... (Literally, it says, "He could not use his right hand." Which means he was probably disabled... his right-hand had been crushed or born withered.)

This was a society **even more cruel** to disabled people than our own. So to have a guy whose right hand was useless would have meant that he was thought of as useless.)² **But Ehud was brave**, and a man of faith.

He volunteered to deliver a tribute payment to Eglon. So he loaded up his wagon with gold, but he also packed a little surprise:

¹⁶Now Ehud had made a double-edged sword about a cubit long (18" or so), which he strapped to his right thigh under his clothing (*conceal carry knife*).¹⁷ He presented the tribute to Eglon, who was a very fat man. That seem like an *irrelevant detail*? Oh, but it's not...

¹⁸After Ehud had presented the tribute, he... said, "Your Majesty, I have a secret message for you." (Eglon was like, "Oooh.... A secret message!" *Is this like a hidden map of invisible ink on the back of the Declaration of Independence? Maybe he was hoping Ehud brought a snack and didn't want to share?* The king said to his attendants, "Leave us!" And they all left.

- I can't help it, but when I depict this scene in my mind, I depict this: **Jabba the Hutt.**) Luke Skywalker.

²⁰As the king rose from his seat, ²¹Ehud reached with his left hand, drew the sword from his right thigh and plunged it into the king's belly.

- Now, Eglon literally **did not see this coming**.
- Remember Ehud had a **withered right hand**. Eglon would not have seen him as a **threat**; if he had, he would never have let him in unattended... But this is a **disabled guy**. **Doesn't even** have a strong right arm!

²²Even the handle sank in after the blade, and his bowels discharged. The NIV is actually being a little polite, here. Literally, it says, "The dung came out." **Gross, right?**

Even better... Ehud did not pull the sword out, and the fat closed in over it. (I don't even want to imagine... loud, sucking sound and it just disappears.)²³ Then Ehud went out to the porch; he shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them.

²⁴After he had gone, the servants came and found the doors of the upper room locked. They said, "He must be relieving himself in the inner room of the palace." (It smelled like that; see previous verse.)

² Tim Keller, *Judges for You*.

²⁵ They waited to the point of embarrassment (At first, they made a few jokes, “You guys hear any movement in there?” “No, but I smell one.” But then it got weird... (YOU CAN TAKE THE BOY OUT OF THE JOB OF YOUTH PASTOR, BUT YOU’LL NEVER TAKE THE YOUTH PASTOR OUT OF THE BOY... SO...), ~~but~~ when he did not open the doors of the room, they took a key and unlocked them. There they saw their lord fallen to the floor, dead.

Well, by now Ehud is now safely away from the palace, and he rallies Israel... and they rise up against Moab... ³⁰ That day Moab was made subject to Israel, and the land had peace for eighty years.

(Lessons for Spiritual Struggle from a Left-Handed Savior)

Well, **again, believe it or not**, some of the most essential keys for spiritual victory are found in this colorful, slightly disgusting story.

I’ll start with the most important:

1. God’s Savior would come in weakness

- With Ehud, a **very important trajectory** has begun in Judges... a completely unexpected one.
- **The book of Judges opens with Joshua.** Joshua was a mighty general, who led a strong, Israelite army. He was what you’d think of as the ultimate warrior leader. If I were going to **choose someone to play** him in a movie, I’d choose Russell Crowe.
 - (But **even after a leader and success like that**, Israel is still is not faithful to God.)
- So, just a couple chapters into Judges, the 1st major story we come to is that of **Ehud, a left-handed, crippled leader**... And at first he doesn’t even fight with an army; he **kills Eglon by himself**. *Then* the army fights. If I were **casting for him**, I’d probably use Nicolas Cage.
- The **next Judge** will be **Deborah**, whose story we’ll get to in a couple of weeks. She partners up with a **somewhat cowardly man, Barak**. Meryl *Streep* and Ben *Affleck*. This story is fascinating in how it elevates women—which I’ll you—but **it shattered common Israelites conceptions of strength**.
 - And **whereas Joshua and Ehud lead all the tribes** into battle, Debbie and Barak lead only **two tribes** into battle, not all 12...
- After that, we have **Gideon**, who is kind of a timid leader at first, but God has him whittle his army down to 300! With 300 he beats the entire army of Midianites. For him, I’d choose Bradley Cooper.
- Then we have **Samson**, who fights all by himself... he whips a whole Philistine army with a jawbone of a donkey. For him, I’d probably recast **Nicolas Cage**, because that man is a national treasure.
- **After the book of Judges, we come to David**... a scrawny shepherd boy who writes songs and defeats a giant with a slingshot. Of course, Justin Bieber.

Do you see the trajectory? We are going *from strength to weakness*; from Israel winning battles under the direction of a great, warrior leader and through the strength of their army **to God using a small, weak shepherd boy** to defeat the enemy by himself.

- *This points the way to the **most unexpected** and ‘left-handed’ person of all.* Jesus was an **“unlikely” Savior**. Isaiah says there was *“nothing in his appearance that would attract us to him. He was despised and rejected by men”* (Isaiah 53:2–3).

- *You would never have looked at Jesus and thought, “There’s the Savior of the world.” He was poor. Probably not tall, good-looking and commanding... hate to BURST YOUR BUBBLE, but prob not JIM CAVIEZEL*
- And **he achieved this victory all alone, like David**, “on behalf of his people but not helped in any way by them. And he **crushed his people’s enemies** through his own weakness, like Ehud.”³
- **Just as Ehud’s victory was a surprise** to Eglon, so Jesus’ victory came as a complete surprise to the forces of evil.
 - THEY DIDN’T SEE IT COMING—the Roman political leaders and the Jewish religious leaders thought they had killed him... he was no threat. But when they closed the door on him in death he **pulled out the dagger of resurrection** and stabbed the powers of death in the heart.
- JUDGES TELLS YOU THAT GOD IS GOING TO SEND SALVATION IN A WAY NO ONE WAS EXPECTING AND A LOT OF PEOPLE WOULD MISS. *Paul said that **Jesus was a stumbling block to both** the Jews and Greeks, because he did not meet either of their expectations...*
 - *When the Jews thought about salvation, they were looking for **a mighty warrior King** who would end all oppression and enrich is people, Israel.*
 - *Greeks were looking for **a philosopher-King** who would educate and enlighten the world.*
 - *But **no one expected a Savior** who would not even own a home and be executed as a criminal.*
- **Today people miss him because we are looking for a different kind of Savior: B. Ehrman:** *What would it take to make you believe in Jesus? “Had he ended all suffering.”* In other words, “Jesus is too politically weak to be a Savior from God.” **But what if he had a different way of defeating evil**—what if **our main problem** was not suffering on earth but separation from God; what if the real tragedy was not that we suffer with cancer but that we die in the first place, and **what if Jesus saved** us by removing the curse by suffering in our place and then **stabbing death in the heart** by his resurrection?
 - **So that we could say** *death, where is your sting; grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin; the curse of sin is the law; Jesus abolished them both.*
- *Listen, church: The whole Bible points to Jesus.*
 - **Why I believe...** Often talk about prophecies (300+). Very convincing!
 - But **these kinds of predictions are even more convincing** to me... **one story: completely unique** among religions: *God saves through weakness and surprise and substitution, not strength and conquest.*

2. God saves us now through the “weakness” of faith

- *To get this point, you have to understand that we are all trying to save ourselves... Israel in captivity under the subjugation of cruel forces gives us a picture of every human being.*
- **We know we need** some kind of salvation. Both religious and irreligious people know this; they just seek it in different places...
 - *Religious people* try to earn salvation from God by being good enough—morally strong enough—to earn his blessing.
 - *If I’m **good enough**; morally **strong enough**; keep the **rules and the tenets** of my religion well enough; God will accept me.*
 - *Irreligious* try to find salvation outside of God, but through the same approach—they try to be strong enough to obtain meaning and purpose and fulfillment for themselves:
 - *If I’m **rich enough**, I’ll be safe and happy. So I have to work...*
 - *If I’m a good mother, or a good spouse, I’ll know I’m worth something.*

³ Tim Keller, *Judges for You*, 49–50.

- If I **set myself** apart, my life will have purpose.
 - Don't know if you saw this week but **Madonna is** back in the news with some ridiculous outfit... when I saw the story, I thought of something I read in *Vogue Magazine* years ago that explains it (**which I know raises it's own questions**): *"My drive in life comes from a fear of being mediocre. That is always pushing me. I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being but then I feel I am still mediocre and uninteresting unless I do something else. Because even though I have become somebody, I still have to prove that I am somebody. My struggle has never ended and I guess it never will."*⁴ Regardless of what you think about Madonna, that is a very insightful statement.
- Other people think that if they can just find the right person to love, their life will have meaning and the void will be filled:
 - Interview with **Drake** a few years ago, after being nominated for 2 Grammys. *"There was a point where I felt like I needed to keep the company of a different woman every night. I was trying to fill a void." But in the 15 or so seconds after sex, I'd know it wasn't working. That 15 or 20 seconds is the realest moment a man will ever have in his life... the next day I'd convince myself to do it again. But during that time I knew it wasn't working.*
 - "An anthropologist once asked a Hopi man (primitive tribal culture) why so many of his people's songs were about rain. The Hopi replied that it was because water was their life... their salvation. **They were scared to death to be without it, because it made the difference between life and death. The Hopi man then asked, 'why are so many of your people's songs about love?'**"⁵
- **These are all ways we search for salvation**, freedom from the bondage of futility and dissatisfaction and meaninglessness and pain

GOD'S SALVATION WOULD COME A DIFFERENT WAY: NOT THROUGH RELIGIOUS STRENGTH, OR CAREER STRENGTH, OR BEAUTY... A GIFT

- In **Philippians 3**, Paul talks about how he tried to find salvation through both religious and irreligious ways:
 - He said, "I first tried to find peace with God by keeping the law better than everyone else."
 - Then I tried to find **fulfillment and purpose by setting myself apart** from others: I was from the best family; graduated from the best school; had the best job.
- He said, "Now, I see all those things as **worthless—dung.**"
- Righteousness, acceptance with God, fulfillment... all these things I was seeking, he said, are given as a gift through faith. The "weakness" of faith. You just receive it as a gift of mercy.
 - In 1 Cor he says that Jews and Greeks stumble over salvation because it looks foolish to them—it just looks too easy. The **Jews want to earn it** through moral superiority; the **Greeks want to earn it** through mental superiority. **THE ROMANS** through **political superiority**. But God's righteousness, he says, and God's wisdom, and God's blessing... **It's all a gift** you can only receive!

*[27] For God chose what is foolish in the world (CHRIST) to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; [28] God chose what is low and despised in the world... to bring to nothing things that are, [29] so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. [30] Christ Jesus became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, [31] so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."*⁶

⁴ Tim Keller, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*, 22.

⁵ Danny Akin, *God on Sex*, 207.

⁶ 1 Cor 1:21–31

- God's blessing, God's victory, God's acceptance, can **only be received** as a gift! *Can you abandon your salvation efforts and receive God's blessing, and acceptance, as a GIFT?*
- What keeps us is not that the left hand of our weakness, but the right hand of our strength

3. God mocks those who oppose him

- A **biblical scholar named Dale Ralph Davis**⁷ said that most commentators miss the humor of this story. This story is told as a big joke! It's not that it was not true... They were mocking Eglon! They would have told it with laughter. That's why there are all these bizarre details...
- I see two messages in that. The first is: **be assured that God will mock those oppose him.**
- Charles Spurgeon, to his congregation in 1856: *"He who would place himself in front of a fast moving railway car will be crushed and would be no more foolish than you who are opposing the gospel. If the gospel is true, truth is mighty and it will prevail. Who are you to attempt to stand against it? You will be crushed. But let me tell you, when the railway car runs over you the wheel will not be raised even an inch by your size. For what are you? A tiny gnat, a creeping worm, which that wheel will crush to less than nothing and not leave you even a name as having ever been an opponent of the gospel. Let (everyone) in the world know assuredly that the gospel will win its way, whatever they may do. Poor creatures...their efforts to oppose the gospel are not even worthy of our notice. And we need not fear that they can stop the truth. They are like a gnat who thinks he can quench the sun. Go tiny insect and do it if you can. You will only burn your wings and die. Likewise there may be a fly who thinks it could drink the ocean dry. Drink the ocean if you can, O fly! More likely you will sink in it and it will drink you."*
 - Not sure if that needs any explanation...
 - **Those who stand against God** have a day where they look like they are in charge...
 - But **God is working history so that his agenda** will be accomplished; **his name** will be glorified... and **those who stood** against him will seem like a gnat who stood on a traintrack and defied a train.
- (BTW: **What emotion do you feel** when you hear that? How can we not feel compassion? If you see someone **like a gnat on a train track**, you would feel compassion! BLIND MAN
 - Confession: **I get angry**... usually it is because I want to justify myself. "I'm not dumb." If you see people in the actual state they are in when they oppose God, you don't feel anger; you don't feel the need to self-justify... you feel compassion. You want to say, "Wakeup!"
 - Anger toward others who oppose you is a sign of insecurity in your faith!

I don't have to be angry...

The other lesson I learn from the humorous way this story is told is:

4. One day we will re-tell the stories of our suffering with laughter and joy

- **The oppression they felt was real, and bitter, and painful.** But here they tell it with laughter... they look back on that painful chapter and recast it in the colors of joy.
- Our pain, and oppression... is real. I don't want to take away from it. But one day we will tell it without tears.
- God's resolution to our pain will make the oppression seem trivial...
 - I love **Lewis' imagery**: like a *bad night in cheap hotel*.

⁷ Dale Ralph Davis, *So Great Salvation: Focus on the Bible Series*. (Judges 3).

- **Illus. Rick:** suggestion of hotel. Very annoying. Now, the **tears of pain will turn into the laughter of triumph!**

Last lesson:

5. In God's Kingdom, availability is more important than ability

- **Ehud was a very unlikely candidate** for a hero. He didn't even have a strong right hand. But he was **willing to yield** himself to be used by the Spirit of God.
 - God's Kingdom in the world today **does not come** through **ability**, but availability.
- Jesus **taught his disciples** that he could do more in a few minutes than they could do in a lifetime!
 - **Best example: Ex. John 6...** Philip speaks up, somewhat sarcastically: all of us, with jobs, could get a job and work for 8 months... Jesus takes a little boy with a lunchable... a Hebrew Happy meal...
 - Only miracle recorded in all 4 Gospels... because he was, among other things, teaching them a pattern for ministry. One day they would face not a crowd of 5000 hungry, but a millions of lost people starving for the gospel! He wanted them to know it was not about their powers to do their work, but what he could do through them.
 - That he could do more in with the little boys' lunch in 10 minutes than Bill Gates would do with all his fortune in 10 lifetimes!
- **And so, today, God advances his kingdom not through human strength, but willing vessels.**
 - **Philip, Acts 8...** Jesus accomplished more through one act of obedience than through anything the Apostles could have planned in 20 years of mission trips.
 - **It's not about winning the world for God;** it's about yielding ourselves to the Spirit of God to let him work through us.

It's just obedience. On Friday I received the most extraordinary note from someone at our Cary campus:

On the way home from Bible Study, we were coming up Lake Wheeler and an older Muslim woman was standing next to a stopped car and started running after Bobby's car. She had run out of gas. Much to my protest (I just don't trust people) Bobby stayed with her, and she gave him money to get gas and he went to fill up a tank for her. When he got back, he was trying to give her the money back... She didn't speak English well. Bobby told her to keep the tank and told her he just came from small group where he said God had blessed him so much this year, and he couldn't keep her money. At this point another Muslim woman got out of the car and thanked him profusely and said he was a "God send" and it meant so much to her because her son had just been murdered in Chapel Hill. Bobby told her we had just left small group and had prayed for them there.

We had literally just left small group where we were praying over the family and loved ones of those murdered in Chapel Hill two days ago. I think it is amazing in a time where Muslims in America feel so persecuted, Bobby could be a light in a difficult situation tonight. And, perhaps that he could be a tiny witness of God's love to them.

- You may not feel like you are much, but God can use YOU.
- You say, 'But I don't have much talent... I am not 'right-handed'
 - **Adrian Rogers:** Who here was Valedictorian?
 - You might be surprised at how God uses you if you yield yourself to him!
 - Zech 4:6

- *Have you yielded yourself to him, to say, “God, how do you want to use me?”*
 - *What have you told me to do I’m not doing?*
 - *What burden have you put on my heart, or what ministry vision have you given to me?*
 - *What person have you urged me to reach out to—to share with?*
 - *When God tells you to stop the car, STOP.*
- God does his work in the world through ordinary people, just obeying him in ordinary ways... faithfully **serving as a mother**; faithfully **sharing Christ with a friend**; faithfully **caring your neighbors** or serving in our **kids’ ministry** here or stopping to buy a **tank of gas** for a Muslim neighbor
- And God takes those **weak acts of obedience** and **infuses them with power**.
- It’s **not about the right hand of your ability**, but the left hand of weakness yielded to God in availability.

Conclusion:

Have you discovered the ‘secret’ of Christianity?

- **Salvation comes not by strength but by a gift given to those weak enough to receive it...**
- And the same with God’s power... not through extraordinary talent, but by simply yielding yourself in weakness and faith to the Spirit of God?

Bullpen:

- Jesus is a stretcher. You have to recognize there is no way you can get yourself there; you just have to receive what he offers as a gift!
-
- *[20] Where is the one who is wise? ...Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? [21] For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, [24] but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. [25] For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*

[26] For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. [27] But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; [28] God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, [29] so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. [30] And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, [31] so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."⁸

- Israel's victory would not come through the glory of their strength, the skill of their armies, or their personal righteousness—it would be won for them by a Savior who came in weakness and won the battle on their behalf!

One huge advantage is that because society is designed for righties, most lefties are relatively **capable with their right hand**. The opposite isn't true for righties, who are complete morons with their left.

Baals all around us. Whom will you follow? Temptation to money lurks at your door, ready to kill you! (think of Rob O here)

"lead me not into temptation!"

Last week I explained that the book of Judges is like a Museum... Israel's religious life was a spiritual cycle. They disbelieve and disobey; they suffer because of it; God has pity; then God raises up a deliverer.

We see that cycle described in 2:18, ¹⁸Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the LORD relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them. (pity) ¹⁹But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors, following other gods and serving and worshiping them.

- Salvation and peace rest upon the leadership of God's judge. But they die; and the peace dies with them.⁹ Israel's very 1st judge, whom we won't discuss, was named Othniel (3:7–11): A great man of faith; filled with the Spirit of God; established peace while was alive, but he died. And Israel goes back to its wayward ways.

⁸ 1 Cor 1:21–31

⁹ Tim Keller, *Judges for You*, 45.

²⁰ And so the LORD said, "Because this nation has violated the covenant I ordained for their ancestors and has not listened to me, ²¹ I will no longer drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. ²² I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the LORD and walk in it as their ancestors did."

[3:1] Now these are the nations that the LORD left, to test Israel by them, that is, all in Israel who had not experienced all the wars in Canaan. [2] It was in order that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, to teach war to those who had not known it before.

- Stop... something very important that will explain some things in your life. **Question:** Why did God leave the pockets of Canaanites in the land? Wasn't it because Israel had just not believed? Did you see a 2nd reason in there? "In order to test them... to teach them to know war."
 - Imagine you were an Israelite child, and you had just gotten back from Sunday School, and that day you had learned about God's promise to give Israel the Promised Land of Canaan. But you know there are pockets of Canaanites left everywhere, and so you say, "Dad, why are all these unbelieving people left in our land? Didn't God give it to us?" One answer is, "Because of the sin our parents." That would be true. You, as the child, respond, "Well, their sin is not our sin. So, after they died, why didn't God just drive them out for us?" To teach you to trust him.
- Why does God leave trials, temptations? Do you ever wonder why God doesn't just cure us of sin? Why not go ahead and give us heaven now (pain-free and sin-free)? To teach you to trust.
 - Struggles against sin
 - Pain
- Some translations say, "To humble them."
 - The greatest posture you can have is of dependence on God. So God will often allow you to struggle in one area to keep you from another more insidious area: pride.
 - Rick and journaling...
 - Newton
 - **Psalm 119:67, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word..."**
 - Me with marriage

Listen: God is relentlessly committed to our faith and obedience

- Are you in pain now?
 - Disciplines those he loves
 - Not to pay you back, but bring you back
 - I'm not saying that all suffering is tied to something God is trying to correct... sometimes it is just to teach you to trust and hope in him more!
- Are you the kind who needs to be afflicted to obey?

One of the first Judges was Ehud. His story begins in 3:12—

¹⁸ Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived; for the LORD relented because of their groaning under those who oppressed and afflicted them. (pity) ¹⁹ But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their ancestors, following other gods and serving and worshipping them.¹⁰

- Salvation and peace rest upon the leadership of God's judge. But they die; and the peace dies with them.
- Israel goes back to its ways. Vs. 16, they "whored themselves out to other gods." A powerful image: Sin is spiritual adultery.
- How do you see God? Here in Judges, he is a loving father. A loving husband.

The trajectory toward a Savior who saves alone

- "Each judge increasingly has to do the saving him or herself. As Israel's judge, Othniel 'went to war' (3:10), implicitly with all the fighters among Israel at his back. Ehud struck down the enemy king on his own, before leading 'the Israelites' into battle (v. 27–29). The next judges, Deborah and Barak, together lead only two tribes (4:9–10)—and the last judge, Samson, has to deliver Israel single-handedly (16:29–30)... This all points the way to the most unexpected and 'left-handed' person of all. Then *the Judge* came, 'he had ... nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men (Isaiah 53:2–3). He achieved his victory all alone, on behalf of his people but not helped in any way by them. And he crushed his people's enemies through his own weakness, like Ehud.'" (49–50)

Blessed among women

You must obey (Judges 5:23)

¹⁰ Tim Keller, *Judges for You*, 45.