

Introduction:

1. It was a dramatic action. Israel, by God's power, swept into Canaan and conquered their foes. The young nation then basked in the glory of God and indulged itself in the luxurious Promised Land that flowed with milk and honey. They faithfully served the Lord, Joshua 24:14-16, 31.
2. But, their faithfulness didn't last; they forgot God. Judges portrays a dark picture for Israel.
 - a. The people of God left an opening for the devil, Judges 1:28. The enemy was not driven out.
 - b. With time, a defection of heart occurred, Judges 2:10-13. This was the beginning of a cycle that was repeated in Judges: a cycle of rebellion, retribution, repentance, rescue and rest.
3. In the periods of rescue, God raised up deliverers to lead Israel: judges. The first was Othniel, Judges 3:7-11. See the five points of the cycle. Israel was doomed to repeat this over and over. Their problem is easy to identify. They forgot God—and *forgetting leads to failure!*
 - a. This text says a lot about Israel's on and off relationship with God; it shows people leaving God and returning--and may raise questions about us. It also reveals a lot about Satan.
 - b. *Satan is a relentless adversary*. He pursued Israel. He will pursue us, 1 Peter 5:8.

The Lesson:**I. Satan works to make men forget God.**

- A. In Joshua's time, the people had a close union with God, but they couldn't rely on the past to secure the present. They forgot God, Joshua 3:7.
 1. We can't rely on our fellowship with God or our spirituality in days past. Where am I *now*? Not, did I seek Him then, but do I seek Him *now*?
 2. The people of Jeremiah's day had forgotten God, Jeremiah 2:32.
- B. Backsliders often seem unaware they have fallen away—another scheme of Satan! Israel was slow to discover their failure; they were surprised God was against them.
 1. Do Christians ever assume all is well with them and God, when it isn't? See James 4:2-4.
 2. We must examine our faith, 2 Corinthians 13:5. Israel failed to examine themselves.
 3. We may not be so *fortunate* as to have a terrorizing enemy bring us to our senses. We struggle to honestly evaluate our personal character and faith. Do we struggle because we spend so much time judging everyone else's faith! (Satan is at work, isn't he?)
 4. God warned Israel Deuteronomy 8:11-14. Can we learn from Israel? James 1:25.
 5. It's not that God is completely removed from our minds. We forget Him by ceasing to rely upon Him, include Him, consider Him, and render acts of service to Him. We forget Him by failing to honor Him through loving obedience; we forget our sense of indebtedness. People leave God after they've first forgotten God!
 6. We forget God by allowing other things to crowd Him out, Mark 4:19.
- C. Satan will see to it that there are things in your life that will tempt you to forget God.

II. Failure's end is worse than we imagine.

- A. *Cushan-rishathaim*, Judges 3:8, means "Cushan of two-fold wickedness." He was double bad! His name described his reputation as an oppressor and a ruthless warlord.
1. Israel mingled with heathens and served heathen gods, so the Lord gave them a savage and barbaric heathen king to rule over them. They paid a heavy price to their conqueror.
 2. They served Cushan for eight years. What must it have been like? Eight years of absolute terror! Cities burned, lives destroyed. Their peace, freedom and prosperity all gone!
- B. Why did Israel wait eight years to cry out to the Lord?
1. Maybe they didn't want to admit their wrong. Maybe they thought they could overcome Cushan. But he was insurmountable; he didn't go away! Israel turned to God in dire need!
 2. Why do we wait so long to cry out to God? Do we think we can handle our problems on our own? When we sin, our sins don't just go away. We need a remedy. It is hard see the horrible places spiritual failure can take us: "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, cost you more than you want to pay, keep you longer than you want to stay, and hurt you more than you can imagine."
 3. The devil assaults young people with the three "L's"--Lust, Language and Liquor. What does going down that path produce? Failure's end is worse than you imagine! What you crave can enslave; what you desire can deceive, disappoint and destroy you.
- C. If we could see the full force of failure's end—where the devil wants to take us—we would flee from sin. We wouldn't tolerate it in our lives at all. We would quickly plead to God for mercy.

III. God makes a way back.

- A. Satan wants us to believe it is hopeless. "You can't come back. God has rejected you. You will be embarrassed." Satan works hard to lead us astray; will he then make it easy to go back?
- B. In spite of what the devil does, God makes a way back! Though Israel acknowledged their sin, they needed God to undo what they had done. God raised up a deliverer, Judges 3:9-10!
1. The Lord empowered Othniel; the Lord gave Cushan into his hand.
 2. Their sin got the people into trouble; God's mercy and power got them out of it!
- C. God delivered the people only when they were truly sorry for their sins, Judges 3:9a.
1. Their recovery began by recognizing their failure; so it is with us, 2 Corinthians 7:10.
 2. Do we admit sin only because God requires it? Or do we admit it because we realize something terrible is happening to us? Its effects can be dreadful and devastating.
 3. Jesus is our deliverer, Romans 5:8. He delivered you once; he can deliver you again!
- D. Satan wants you to think there is no way back to God. Satan lies, 1 John 1:8-10.

Conclusion:

1. God makes a way back...for now! Don't wait until Judgment Day to try to find your way back!
2. The result of Israel's return was rest. What Satan denied them, God restored. What about you?