

GOD'S POWER IN US (2)

• JUDGES 3:12-32 •

"Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord. And he gathered to himself the sons of Ammon and Amalek; and he went and defeated Israel, and they possessed the city of the palm trees. And the sons of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.

"But when the sons of Israel cried to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for them, Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man. And the sons of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab" (3:12-15).

Two Texans were traveling together on vacation. They decided to stop at one of the natural wonders of the world, Niagara Falls. As they took the beautiful drive from Lake Erie to the falls, they were filled with admiration and awe at the size and the power of the Niagara River. They were particularly impressed with the rapids just above the falls and stopped to take in that scene. They could see the massive mist cloud that always hangs over the precipice.

One of the men, having already visited Niagara Falls, said, "Come and I'll show you the greatest unused power in the world." Taking him to the foot of Niagara Falls, he said, "There is the greatest unused power in the world."

"Ah, no, my friend, not so!" was the reply of the other. "The greatest unused power in the world is the power of the living God in a person's

life." In this lesson, let us look again at God's power within us.

Judges 3:12 begins the story of the second major oppression of God's people. After forty years of peace in the land, the people of God once again did "evil in the sight of the Lord." As punishment, God sent another nation to oppress them. This time He used the nation of Moab and its king, Eglon.

The Moabites were Israel's cousins, being descendants of Lot. They lived on the western side of the Jordan River. During the days of their oppression of Israel, they formed a powerful league with the nations of Amalek and Ammon. This mighty army crossed the Jordan and invaded the land of Israel. In the process of this invasion, they took possession of "the city of palm trees" (i.e., Jericho, Deuteronomy 34:3). Thus began an eighteen-year slavery for God's people.

Ehud, a Benjamite, took a gift to the oppressing king. However, God had a much more important job in mind for Ehud. It was by the hand of Ehud that God planned to defeat the oppressing nation and free His people.

The context indicates that Ehud was on a secret mission. Ehud delivered the gift to Eglon, left with his Jewish companions, and later returned by himself to carry out his divinely ordained mission. When he arrived at Eglon's parlor the second time, Ehud told the king that he had a secret message that only the king needed to hear. Eglon told Ehud to be quiet until he secured the room. Eglon then dismissed all of his servants

and guards from the room. He must have thought that Ehud was bringing him information concerning some secret plan of treason that was brewing back in his home town. Eglon was anxious to hear about this "secret message."

When the doors were closed and Ehud and Eglon were alone, Ehud told Eglon that he had a message from God. That really got Eglon's attention. The obese king stood up and went closer to Ehud to hear this secret message. It was then that Ehud plunged an eighteen-inch dagger into Eglon's stomach. Ehud quickly left Eglon's summer house, closing the doors behind him. Since Eglon's servants thought he was napping, they left him alone for a considerable amount of time. Finally, they went in to find their king lying dead in a pool of blood. While this was happening, Ehud had already made his way to Mount Ephraim where he blew a trumpet, gathering the children of Israel together for war. Once the army was gathered, Ehud informed them of the victory that they were about to win over the forces of Moab. With freedom in view, the warriors of Israel defeated all the soldiers of Moab, and God gave the land rest for eighty years (3:20).

Verse 31 tells briefly of another victory that God granted his people. A man named Shamgar killed six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad. An oxgoad is a five- to seven-foot stick which was used for prodding oxen along as they were plowing, pulling a cart, etc. With this instrument Shamgar killed six hundred Philistines. How amazing!

This victory is somewhat different from the ones led by Othniel and Ehud. First, it is an isolated battle involving only one of God's people rather than the full scale wars that took place in the other two instances. Second, no indication is given that God's people were freed from any oppression as a result of this battle. The Philistines were a constant irritation to God's people. They grew stronger, in fact, until finally in the days of Samson they became the chief oppressing nation (13:1). Since the next recorded event took place "after Ehud died" (4:1), Shamgar's battle probably took place at some point during the eighteen-year oppression of Moab. When we read of his victory combined with the victory over Moab, we see that God can do wonderful things through anyone who is willing to be used by Him. The same is true today!

POWER, IF WE ARE DEDICATED

From Philippians 4:13 we learn that we can "do all things" through Christ. Paul's statement could have been written by any of the judges that have been studied so far, for they truly did powerful things through the strength that God gave them. However, the truth is that Philippians 4:13 was not written by an Old Testament character who was referring to the miraculous works that God performed in the Old Testament period. This verse was written by a New Testament apostle who was referring to what God can do through His people in the Christian dispensation. Tremendous power is available to all of God's children today who are willing to be used by Jehovah. Let us examine ourselves and the churches of which we are a part in light of Philippians 4:13.

A man was looking for a gardener, and he was accepting applications for the position. Attached to one application was a letter of recommendation. The man became very interested as he read the letter which told about the talents of this applicant. The letter said that this fellow had the greenest thumb of anyone around. He could make the plants grow, he could eliminate all weeds out of the garden, and he could trim the hedges to perfection. When the man got to the end of the first page he turned it over and on the other side were written three simple words, "*But he won't.*" That is not much of a recommendation, is it? Who wants to hire someone who has the ability to do many great things, but will not do any of them?

Before you become too critical of a man who will not work, what would God's letter of recommendation say about you? "_____ can do all things through the strength that I give him. He can lead hundreds of people to salvation, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and encourage the downtrodden. He can teach a class, help his brothers and sisters to grow in My likeness, and know My word well enough to include it in his everyday conversation." That is what all of our letters would say because God has promised to give us all of these things. It is completely up to us whether our letter would have the words, "*But he won't,*" attached to it or not.

God has done His part in giving us the victories. They are just waiting to be won. The only thing that is missing is our determination to be used by God to win those victories.

POWER, IF WE DREAM

Are you a part of a congregation where the status quo is being maintained and little is being accomplished? In the average "status quo" congregation, you will find a certain number of hard-working, God-loving people. Why is God's work *not* being stunted? The answer may be found in Ephesians 3:20: "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think." Paul challenges us to dream a big dream regarding our work for the Lord. Whatever that dream might be, Paul says that God can do it. He can do above it. He can do exceedingly above it. He can do exceedingly, abundantly above it. God's power is greater than our biggest dream.

What is the problem? Why are so many congregations of God's people doing so little for Him? *Is it because we are not dreaming?* Just think about it for a moment. How long has it been since you gave more than ten minutes worth of thought to what you want to accomplish for God this year? Most of us go through this world taking things as they come with no real plan or dream in our hearts. No power resides in that kind of life! No victory resides in that kind of life! The victories that God has in store for His people are reserved for those who will dream big dreams for Him and then present themselves as tools in His hands to accomplish those dreams!

Entire congregations of God's people have a dwarf-size faith. They think they are accomplishing a great deal when they add on to their building or build a new parking lot. They think that they are being champions for God when the end of the year rolls around and they have just baptized their tenth person into Christ. Without minimizing these things, God wants us to do so much more. Whether you live in a country community in Virginia or a metropolitan community in New York or in India, God can do great things through you. Neither the size of the town nor your age or occupation can keep God's victories from being won if you dream great dreams.

POWER, IF WE ARE DILIGENT

After we have dreamed these dreams for God, the victories will be ours if we have a willingness to work to fulfill those dreams. No matter what kind of dreams were being dreamed, God's people would have remained in slavery to Mesopotamia and Moab unless someone stood

up and said, "Here am I, send me." It took men like Othniel and Ehud who were filled with faith in what God can do to make those dreams a reality.

Someone has to report for duty before the throne of Jehovah if the church is to grow. Whether it is evangelism, visitation, benevolence, or some other work, God will do great things only through those who are willing to be used. You can start it where you live. You can be God's champion right now. All you have to do is present your dreams to God and then be ready to be used. The powerful victories that God won with Othniel and Ehud will pale in significance when compared to what He will do through His champions today!

CONCLUSION

Truly many times in the days of the judges, Israel said, "Phooey," to God. They were a most defiant and sinful group of people. However, from God's actions in Judges 3, it is clear that even those kind of people can be used powerfully by Him once they repent and report for duty. What a difference God made in the history of His people! What a difference He continues to make among His people today who have a dream in their hearts and a fire in their bones!

She could not have been more than three
When I watched her striving diligently
To put together a broken vase
That she had knocked from its sitting place.

As she held the pieces in her hand
And tried so hard to understand
Just where they fit and what to do
To make the vase again like new,

I thought, "My child, how hard for you!"
So I took the pieces and some glue
And very soon the lovely vase
Was returned to its sitting place.

Today God watched me in my strife
Trying to repair a broken life.
The pieces fit, it seemed, nowhere;
And I struggled more in deep despair.

'Twas then He seemed to say, "My child,
Be patient just a little while;
The pieces fit when you understand
They must be placed by the Master's hand."

As in the days of the judges, God can take a muddled wreck of a life and turn it into something beautiful and useful in His sight!

—Craig Tappe