

Introduction

- Go to a theatre or a concert and someone will try and sell you a **programme!**
 - programme will tell you all sorts of information about what you are about to see
 - who is involved, what the running order is, things to watch out for...
 - all of which (generally) enhances your ability to enjoy and get the most out of the performance!
- In Judges, **we are just before the main performance**
 - we have a programme in our hands - chapters one and two
 - and in a moment the stage will be clear and we'll meet the first of the characters...
 - but first, lets look at the programme a little (would have done more a couple of weeks back, but it was a family service)

Overview of Judges

- Incredibly finely structured book
 - and that structure helps identify the purpose - so useful to know!
 - there are two introductions, the main body of the book, and two matching conclusions
 - (see acetate)
 - first intro is a summary of the military position after Joshua has died
 - matched by the second conclusion, which is a summary of the military position at the end of the Judges period
 - second intro is a summary of the spiritual state of Israel after Joshua has died
 - matched by the first conclusion, which is a summary of the spiritual state of Israel at the end of the Judges period
 - sandwiched in the middle we have the accounts of 12 judges - 6 minor ones, and 6 major ones (distinguished simply by the amount of material we have on them)
 - mostly the major judges are involved in events where Israel needs rescuing from external enemies
 - but there is a progression downwards in quality as we go through the judges
 - Othniel, who we read of earlier, is in some ways a **model** judge - no major character flaws!
 - but things go downhill from there to the far from ideal Samson!
- Though describing a chaotic period of history, this is far from a chaotic book!
 - it traces Israel's apostasy, her turning away from God, and the consequences of that choice
 - it also traces Israel's stubbornness in her apostasy - getting more and more deeply embroiled with each passing generation, rather than learning her lesson
 - **BUT** it also traces Yahweh's compassion and grace filled, undeserved mercy to his people
- Israel is **persistently disobedient**, but God is **persistently compassionate and grace-filled**

The Tyrant

- So let the curtain come up and let us start the show!
 - really concentrating on the story in vs.7-11, and so we meet the tyrant
 - Cushan-Rishathaim; not told much else except for his office (king), nationality (Aram of the 2 rivers) and the length of his rule over Israel
 - name means "**Cushan of double wickedness**"
 - most probably name those under his control coined for him; not the kind of thing mothers name babies!!
 - this terrible oppression - whatever form it took - is linked in the passage to the people's worship of Baal and the Asherahs
- **They had served Baal so they were now going to have to serve Cushan**
- Application: sin has serious consequences!

The Deliverer

- Again, we don't know much!
 - we've met Othniel before; he married Caleb's daughter
 - (it's not clear whether Othniel was really brother of Caleb, or more likely nephew)
 - for these Jews, Caleb was their one link back to the past - following Joshua's departure, he was the "main man"!
 - so Othniel is married into a good family
 - as a Kenazite (v.9) Othniel is a member of the leading tribe of Judah, the one picked out to go first into the land to conquer
(Judah as tribe from whom deliverer will come repeated (cf 1:2)...)
 - what's more, he's clean from the taint of sin; he's married an Israelite girl (Acsah, Caleb's daughter)
 - cf 3:6: "They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods."
- We have no details about the actual fighting!
 - nothing about the army he raised, the battles he fought, the nature of the victory
 - just that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him and that he overpowered Cushan-Rishathaim
 - and what we know of his background, his character
- He's the ideal judge - God's man, chosen by God, living God's way
 - but its quite a bland story! No colour, no interest...

What's it all about?

- So, what's it all about?
 - Othniel and Cushan are actually not the main characters of the story, not the main actors in the drama
 - rather Israel and God are!
 - she has forgotten him, he disciplines her, she repents and cries out to him, and he is gracious to her, sending a deliverer
 - here in microcosm are God's dealings with his people over the centuries!
 - throughout the book of the Judges we will have the same pattern repeated time after time
 - Israel will be under God's discipline and saved by his grace, never merely subject to tyrants or rescued by the power of heroes
- Jesus knew the same reality. Before Pilate, he said:
 - "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." (John 19:11)
- Always we are in the severe and loving hands of our God

Conclusion

- There are three things worth concluding from all of this:
 - first, Othniel the judge, from the tribe of Judah, is the first embodiment of the promise that from Judah would come deliverance, conquest of the land
 - a promise that will grow to include David the king and ultimately find fulfillment in Jesus; so Judges acts as a signpost to the great Saviour yet to come!
 - second, no matter who we have to face, we have nothing to fear
 - because we are always in the hands of God
 - and third, this pattern of rebellion, discipline, repentance, deliverance will not always be so
 - here in Judges 3:11 there is rest in the land for 40 years....
 - but this is nothing compared to the rest that lies ahead for us, an eternal rest, an eternal homeland, and eternal home in God's house, in heaven!

