

In this session, we will look at the first six verses of chapter three in the Book of Judges. Reading these verses, it is easy to gloss over them as a brief introduction to the chapter with some relevance to the remainder of the book-- what a mistake that would be. These verses provide us with an introduction to the chapter and the rest of the book but they also provide much more. These verses highlight the impact on the social life of Israel as a result of the consequences of Israel's actions to date.

Structurally, Judges 3.1-3 and 3.5-6 are what commentator Daniel Block has identified as "circumstantial clauses" that support the purpose statement that is Judges 3.4. A circumstantial clause describes the manner, circumstances, or conditions under which the purpose statement took place. The length of the two circumstantial clauses in verses 1-6 make it very easy to overlook the importance of v4.

Block suggests that thematically these six verses tie together seven threads of thought that have been raised in the preceding two chapters. Following Block's thinking, Thematically this paragraph ties together the following loose ends: (1) the notion of testing (v1, 4) picks up an element from 2:22; (2) with the exception of the Hivites, the list of Canaanite nations in v.5 echoes nations named in chap. 1; (3) the reference to Israel "living among" the Canaanites (v. 5) recalls 1:32-33; (4) the reference to "obeying" the commands of Yahweh recall the accusations of (2:3b, 17); (5) the mention of the commandments of Yahweh in v. 4 links with 2:17b; (6) the reference to commandments given by Yahweh to the fathers in v. 4 recalls "the covenant which I commanded the fathers" in 2:20b, as well as the promise sworn to the fathers in 2:1, and the notice of the fathers fidelity in 2:22; (7) the charge of "serving their gods" in v. 6 offers an abbreviated version of 2:11-13. Yet there is still much more contained in these six verses.

In Judges 3:1-3, the writer lists the nations left behind: Now these are the nations that Yahweh left for Israel to overcome. In Judges 2.22, we were given reasons that God did this: "I will use them to test Israel and see whether they will keep the way of the Lord and walk in it as their forefathers did." Here Yahweh is saying that He will punish Israel for her sins and He will use the nations to test Israel. Judges 3:1-2 gives further explanation for God's reasons for leaving the nations in Canaan. The first reason given is to test Israel by them, as many of Israel had not known all the wars of Canaan. The third generation occupying the Land did not know about these things experientially. The second reason is to learn the art of war (3:2): (he did this only to teach warfare to the descendants of the Israelites who had not had previous battle experience). This does not contradict 2:22. The distinction is between learning the art of war for the future and the wars of Canaan. During the wars of Canaan, Israel, under Joshua, had experienced and learned the power to conquer its foes. Israel's power did not consist in the number of, or the bravery of, its fighting men, but solely in the might of its God,

which was available only when Israel was obedient. Joshua did not win by his strength, but by the works of God. Success was based on keeping the terms of the Mosaic Covenant. That is what is meant by the wars of Canaan.

But now there is a second segment called "learning war," specifically by those who were not living in the days of Joshua and therefore had not learned to make war upon the nations of the Canaanites. The new generation had forgotten the true basis for victory, so it was necessary to teach the Israelites that they cannot defeat the Canaanites by their strength, but only by obedience to God. God left the Canaanites in the Land to teach them how to fight a holy war. The people of Yahweh could only fight and conquer in the power of their God. Disobedience would not only bring defeat, but also subjugation by the Canaanites.

Israel had entered the Promised Land as God's people, with the charge to drive out the inhabitants and claim the land as Yahweh's gift for them. The continued presence of the inhabitants represents a test, for the Israelites, whether they will obey Yahweh as their God and thus their duties in fulfilling His plans. To quote Block, "Yahweh will not do for Israel what they are not willing to do for themselves." One of the key questions to be answered is: Will Israel understand and recognize her role as a covenant people with both the privileges and obligations that go along with being "God's people?"

In 3:3, God names the specific nations, beginning with the five lords of the Philistines that will be left in the Land: "the five rulers of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites living in the Lebanon mountains from Mount Baal Hermon to Lebo Hamath." There are several observations that might be made regarding this list. First, it is different from the list that we saw in first chapter. Second, it adds the Philistines who were not a people native to Canaan. The Hebrew word for lords or rulers as the NIV uses, is *seren*. This Hebrew word is only used of the kings of the Philistines, except once. *Seren* corresponds to the Greek word *tyrannos*, well known in Greek classical writings and would seemingly support the notion that the Philistines were of a Greek-Aegean origin. Third, scholars, such as Block, have suggested that the phrase "all the Canaanites" was likely intended to include some of the other tribes that have appeared on other lists in the Bible. Fourth, the Sidonians, like the Philistines are not usually included in most lists. It is thought that they are likely meant to be representative of the Phoenicians, who in subsequent times became representative of "the original Canaanite population." Fifth, this list is used by the writer to represent the entire land of Canaan. "These four names have the entire land of Canaan covered: southwest (Philistines), northwest (Sidonians), northeast (Hivites), southeast (Canaanites)."

The divine purpose for the continued presence of these opposing people groups is reiterated in Judges 3.4: "They were left to test the Israelites to see whether they would obey the Lord's commands, which he had given their forefathers through Moses." As Daniel Block indicates, God's "purpose is reflected in two

infinitives: “to test” Israel through them and “to determine” whether or not they would express allegiance to Yahweh by obedience to the Mosaic revelation. The test was not for God, who sees all things, but for Israel to give them an objective standard that would measure the level of their obedience or the depth of their disobedience, which deserved the justice of God. The question for the new generation of Israelites was whether they would obey the commandments of God given by the hand of Moses? To ask this question Israel would have to have knowledge of the Law of Moses, knowledge that was obtained through the priesthood, which included the command to drive out all the Canaanites. Learning how the congregation of the Lord was to fight against the enemies of God and of His kingdom was one of the means appointed by God to test whether Israel would listen to the commandments of God and would walk in the ways of the Lord. If Israel were to learn the art of war successfully, they would, at the same time, have to learn to keep the commandments of God. Israel would need to learn to all the commandments of God that were given to Moses.

However, verses 5 to 6 record Israel's failure. As Block suggests these two verses “function as a report card,” for Israel. First, in verse 5, there was a failure of social interaction: The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. The only Canaanite tribe not mentioned that is listed in Deu 7.1, is the Girgashites. No reason is given for why they are missing. In the rabbinic tradition, this Canaanite tribe had moved to Africa because of Joshua's threat. But what 3.5 does show is a failure to obey Deuteronomy 7.1-2, the command to conquer and destroy these enemies. The inference is that wherever Israel went, they failed the test to conquer and destroy the enemy. Block makes an interesting observation that is worth remembering as we read the rest of the Book of Judges. He says, “In general, the remainder of the book reveals a people in tension with outsiders, but these outsiders for the most part (chap. 4 is an exception) are not Canaanites, who would have chafed under their domination as well. These enemies are external agents of divine discipline upon Israel.”

The second failure, in Judges 3:6, was intermarriage: “They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.” This was a failure to obey Deuteronomy 7.3-4. The result of intermarriage was that the Israelites served the gods of their enemies. Judges 3:5-6 provides the theme of the whole Book of Judges: the Canaanization of Israelite society in the areas of religion, ethics, and morality. Israel had become an example of the truth of Ge 34.16: “Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We'll settle among you and become one people with you.” Bear this in mind as you read Judges and encounter Gideon and his Shechemite concubine, whose son, Abimelech, is thoroughly Canaanized (8.29-9.57). Gilead's son, Jephthah, whose mother was a Canaanite prostitute (11.1), offers his daughter as a sacrifice in the way of the Canaanites. Perhaps the ultimate example of the totality of the Canaanization of Israel is embodied in Samson. Samson initially marries a Philistine, and when his marriage fails, he turns to Philistine prostitutes

(chaps. 14-16). These examples serve as further evidence of Israel's failure to obey Yahweh.

What have we learned here? First, the definition of apostasy in the Book of Judges is “abandoning Yahweh in favor of other gods”; that is, they claim to be the people of Yahweh while acting as if they belonged to Baal. The apostasy is described in several ways, such as, transgressing the terms of the covenant, not walking in God's ways, not listening to His voice, not heeding His commands--especially the one of exclusive allegiance since, unlike other gods, Israel's God tolerates no rivals. Second, in turn Israel's failures teach two lessons. The first lesson is that seeing miracles is not a guarantee against apostasy. These people saw miracles and they apostatized anyway. The second lesson is that spiritual and theological apostasy is a subtle process; merely having a correct theology does not guarantee freedom from apostasy. Third, we have found the theme of the Book of Judges: the Canaanization of Israelite society. By not driving out their enemies and destroying them, Israel opened the doors to social integration, which quickly led to spiritual integration. Israel, who entered the Promised Land as a distinct people, the people of Yahweh, have sold their birthright. The rest of the Book of Judges must be understood in this light. Israel has failed and Israel is rightly now under God's judgment.

Daniel Block observes that: “When the narrator begins to recount the socio political crises the nation experiences, the reader should not feel sorry for this people. They have it coming, and more.” Is there a lesson here for us? If we attempt to make peace with the world, then we will find ourselves being “of the world,” and like Israel, we will worship the things of the world rather than our Creator. We will then come to know firsthand the “Canaanization of Israel.”