**God Chooses Judges**

Robert E. Lee said *“It is well that war is so terrible, otherwise we should grow too fond of it”*. For ages, young men have seen war as some great adventure only to discover the horror when in its midst. Ironically, those who have never fought in a war are often the most ardent supporters. Rich nations (such as ours) sometime engage in proxy wars, supporting a poorer nation in a fight they want to avoid, allowing another country to spend blood and treasure instead of its own (some would say Ukraine fits that description). A country at peace for an extended period may find itself without leaders who have wartime experience. That was the situation in Israel we see in chapter 3 of Judges.

The chapter begins with naming the remnants of several nations that remained in Canaan that God left to test the Israelites to see if they would obey His commands. He also used these nations to hone the combat skills of men who had never experienced war. Given the hostile nations surrounding them, the Israelites would need to be able to defend themselves, a situation that continues today. After the death of Joshua, Israel had enjoyed a period of peace, partly because they were unwilling to drive out Canaanites as God had commanded. Apparently, a sufficient number of years had passed without war so that the generation serving in the army had not been in battle. Rather than fighting the various groups left in Canaan, the Israelites chose to live among them. Even worse, their sons and daughters married Canaanites and they worshiped their false gods. As punishment for their evil, God allowed them to be taken over by the king of Aram and they were subject to his rule for 8 years. When they cried out for relief, God raised up Othniel as their judge. Othniel was the nephew of Caleb who had given him his daughter in marriage as a reward for defeating the people of Debir. Verse 10 says that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him and he led them into war, defeating the king of Aram. This is one example of times when the Holy Spirit was at work in the Old Testament. It seems that God sent the Holy Spirit to empower individuals at specific times of need in Israel. It also seems that God sometimes withdrew the Holy Spirit from those people as in the case of Saul (see 1st Sam. 16:14) and Samson (see Judges 16:20).

Othniel was judge for 40 years and Israel enjoyed peace during his tenure. After the death of Othniel, the Israelites again returned to their sinful ways and God gave them over to the king of Moab who took possession of the City of Palms which was Jericho. Again Israel cried out to God and he again sent a judge to rescue the people. God sent a Benjamite named Ehud who was described as a left handed man, a physical attribute that proved beneficial. He obtained a private meeting with the king of Moab and was able to conceal a short sword which he drew with his left hand taking the king by surprise and killing him. He escaped the king’s guards and led the Israelites in battle, killing 10,000 Moabites. The chapter ends with the statement that Israel enjoyed peace for 80 years led by Ehud and Shamgar who followed him as judge.

The early Christian church was hardly at peace the people they lived among. They were persecuted by Jews as well as pagan Gentiles who defended their gods. While the church has mostly enjoyed peace in the U.S. since our founding, that is not the case in much of the rest of the world. Christians are not welcomed in Russia or China and they are constantly threatened in Muslim nations where they try to spread the gospel. In recent years, this animus towards the church has even spread to western Europe. A Swedish pastor was recently convicted of hate speech for a sermon denouncing homosexuality. We need to be prepared for the spiritual warfare that could well spread to our country (see John 15:18).