**What is Life? Part 1**

***Founding Senior Pastor Dr Daniel Ho***

These are the nations the Lord left to test all those Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars in Canaan (he did this only to teach warfare to the descendants of the Israelites who had not had previous battle experience): 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. They were left to test the Israelites to see whether they would obey the Lord’s commands, which he had given their ancestors through Moses.

The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord; they forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs. The anger of the Lord burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram Naharaim, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years. But when they cried out to the Lord, he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, who saved them. The Spirit of the Lord came on him, so that he became Israel’s judge and went to war. The Lord gave Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him. So the land had peace for forty years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died. (Judges 3:1-11)

# Introduction

Life is a warfare / fight. (Judges 3:1, 2; cf. 1 Timothy 1:18, 19; 2 Timothy 4:7)

Sadly, many of us are involved in wrong fights. It is important to be sure that we are engaged in the right fights, to fight the good fight, instead of fighting the wrong fights. Our enemy, the devil, wants us to get caught up fighting the wrong fights, to destroy us, our relationships and our peace. That is why people fight with one another, with family members, church members, colleagues, friends etc. They fight over power, property, and position. There are cases whereby siblings have not been speaking to one another for many years due to a family feud. We need prayer to know how to resolve such conflicts with people. It is such a tragedy to be involved in conflicts that are unnecessary, that rip us apart and destroy our relationships.

# God wants to teach His people the principles of warfare

He did this only to teach warfare to the descendants of the Israelites who had not had previous battle experience. (Judges 3:2)

## To teach and equip them for battle

The devil comes to steal, kill and destroy. The devil wants to steal peace from our hearts and minds so that we are restless within. He wants to kill us in our relationships, so that we are not on talking terms with one another. His purpose is to destroy us in the end.

## The physical battle is a corollary of the spiritual battle His children are to engage in

The physical battles are a reflection of the spiritual battles. We need to know who or what we are really fighting against so we can be ready for spiritual warfare. He wants us to be equipped to deal with the forces of evil and darkness that we are fighting against.

# God wants His people to have the practice in warfare

These are the nations the Lord left to test all those Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars in Canaan: 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. (Judges 3:1, 3)

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God wants to give us opportunities to practice.

## To equip them with skill so that they know how to engage the enemy and deal with the challenges ahead

God allowed these people to remain in the land that He gave the Israelites, in order to equip and train the Israelites for spiritual warfare.

When challenges come, we tap into our potential.

# God is reminding His people about the purpose of warfare

They were left to test the Israelites to see whether they would obey the Lord’s commands, which he had given their ancestors through Moses. (Judges 3:4)

## Whether they will be faithful to the Lord and His commands

God allows us to go through spiritual conflict and warfare, to know if we will be faithful and obedient to His commands, to know if we will remain faithful and committed to Him in the end. Before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they needed to be reminded of the laws and decrees of the Lord, so that they will be careful to observe and obey them. Repetition is needed again and again because people tend to be forgetful.

And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord’s commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good? (Deuteronomy 10:12-13)

## And when blessings come to always remember the Lord and remain humble

God gives His commands to us for our own good. God’s commands are never burdensome or difficult if we truly desire to obey Him. It will be demanding and testing, but as we go through the process of obedience, we will discover that God’s commands are ultimately for our own good. He is tutoring our hearts to become people who are faithful to Him and to His commands. As we are faithful to Him, we will also be able to experience His faithfulness to us.

Some people find it overwhelming that the Bible has so many rules and regulations. However, God gives these commands as guidelines for us to live a life that is truly blessed and prosperous in Him. As we keep close to God and live by His ways, we will be blessed in the process.

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.”But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today. (Deuteronomy 8:10-18)

When life is going well for us and we are blessed, we need to be careful that we do not become proud, thinking to ourselves that all the achievements we have made is done by our own effort, our own strength and resources. We need to guard against pride and taking credit for it.

We need to remember that it is God who gave us the ability to produce wealth, to be successful and to prosper. God wants us to remain humble and teachable, no matter what we have achieved in life. We need to always be thankful for everything God has done and provided for us.

# Examples of warfare through Othniel and Ehud’s role and leadership:

## The people’s wanton living

The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord; they forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs. (Judges 3:7)

Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and because they did this evil the Lord gave Eglon king of Moab power over Israel. (Judges 3:12)

We can turn the good things around us into gods. We can turn material possessions, money, family, career, and many other blessings into idols. We turn money into our idol when we are willing to do anything and everything to gain more money, including compromising our Christian principles. We can also fall into the danger of turning our career into an idol, when we make career our greatest life pursuit. We focus so much time on building our careers to the negligence of our children, leading to what can be termed as “modern child sacrifice”.

## The people’s wasted years

When we live with no reference to God, we backslide and we waste our years away. Time slips by, and there will be increasing confusion and lack of clarity in our lives. If we are not careful, time will pass by us swiftly, without us even realising it, until it is too late.

But when they cried out to the Lord, he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother, who saved them. The Spirit of the Lord came on him, so that he became Israel’s judgeand went to war. The Lord gave Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him. So the land had peace for forty years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died. (Judges 3:9-11)

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God raised up a deliverer only after Israel had a wake-up call. Sometimes, we all need a wake-up call in our lives when we have gone astray. We get so caught up in chasing after the things of the world that we forget what is really and truly important in life. Without realising it, the things of the world have become more important to us than the things of God, and we allow these things to draw us further away from Him.

# Conclusion

Many of the modern problems we encounter has ancient solutions that can be found in the Word of God. We need to pray that our hearts will always be responsive and sensitive to God, and not to wake-up at a time when it is too late. We must not squander our lives away but to steward our lives well, making sure that not a single year is wasted. Let us age together well, like good wine. As wine ages, it gets better and better. So should we! As we age, we should grow to be more loving, kinder and gentler, more thoughtful, more faithful and committed, more humble and more thankful to God, for all that He has done and is doing in our lives.

**A right view of God and the world to come requires that we have also a right view of the world in which we live and our relation to it. So much depends upon this that we cannot afford to be careless about it. – Sybil Brodie**

Sermon summary contributed by Anthea.