An Unlikely Deliverer

Judges 3:15-23, 30
SS Lesson for 10/18/2026

Devotional Scripture: 2 Cor 1:8-11

OUTLINE

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Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

When we hear the word judges, the first image that may come to mind is that of officials adjudicating legal disputes. But that was not their primary task in the book of Judges. Their recorded actions reveal that they were chiefly deliverers or (in an earthly sense) saviors. Judges 2:16 reveals this meaning: "Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them." The book of Judges is largely a compilation of narratives depicting these valiant deliverers for the Israelites during times of oppression. The book begins with events just before Joshua's death. The parallel information in Joshua 24:28-31 and Judges 2:6-10 purposefully links the books chronologically.

Joshua 5:13-12:8 details the Israelites' military exploits in taking possession of the land that God promised; this was in accordance with God's instructions in Deuteronomy 20:16-17. But even after the Israelites defeated thirty-one kings (Joshua 12:24), the Lord cautioned that there was much more to conquer (Joshua 13:1-17). The caution became an accusation in Judges 1:1-2:3, as the narrative describes a mixture of success and failure. At a place called Bokim (meaning "weeping"), the angel of the Lord reminded the Israelites that their failure to finish the conquest amounted to disobedience (Judges 2:2). The long-term result of the Israelites' disobedience was a repeated need—over more than three hundred years!—for strong leaders to be deliverers because of a cyclical pattern of sin. As noted in Lesson 6, the resulting "sin cycles" were characterized by the four-stage sequence of duplicity, disaster, distress, and deliverance. The first recorded deliverer-judge was Othniel, who served forty years in that capacity (Judges 3:7-11). His time frame was perhaps 1373 to 1334 BC. But after his death, the Israelites needed another savior. The Israelites found themselves subjugated by King Eglon of Moab. With help from his neighboring allies, the Ammonites and Amalekites, King Eglon ruled over a portion of the territory of Benjamin and the region assigned to the tribe of Reuben. Eglon's base of power was "the City of Palms"—that is, Jericho (compare Deuteronomy 34:3; Judges 1:16). We speculate that he set up court there to better keep an eye on the Israelites, whom he oppressed for eighteen years.

Key Verses: Judges 3:15

But when the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for them: Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man. By him the children of Israel sent tribute to Eglon king of Moab.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Deliverance through God's Provision (Judges 3:15-18)

15 But when the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for them: Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man. By him the children of Israel sent tribute to Eglon king of Moab.
16 Now Ehud made himself a dagger (it was double-edged and a cubit in length) and fastened it under his clothes on his right thigh.
17 So he brought the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. (Now Eglon was a very fat man.)
18 And when he had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who had carried the tribute.

Provision of a deliverer (15)

A deliverer because of cries to God (Ps 50:15)

15 and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me."

A deliverer through grace (2 Tim 1:8-9)

8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,

A deliverer even when we reach an old age (Isaiah 46:4)

> 4 Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.

A deliverer that will continue to do so (2 Cor. 1:10)

> 10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

A deliverer from oppressors (Neh 9:26-27)

> 26 "But they were disobedient and rebelled against you; they put your law behind their backs. They killed your prophets, who had admonished them in order to turn them back to you; they committed awful blasphemies. 27 So you handed them over to their enemies, who oppressed them. But when they were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies.

A deliverer from the hands of enemies (1 Sam 12:10-11)

> 10 They cried out to the Lord and said, 'We have sinned; we have forsaken the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths. But now deliver us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve you.' 11 Then the Lord sent Jerub-Baal, Barak, Jephthah and Samuel, and he delivered you from the hands of your enemies on every side, so that you lived securely.

Provision of an opportunity (16-17)

God provides opportunities even during temptations (1 Cor 10:13)

> 13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Live wisely at every opportunity (Eph 5:15-16)

> 15 Be very careful, then, how you live, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

Make the most of every opportunity (Col 4:5)

> 5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

Act upon every opportunity with wisdom (Ps 90:12)

> 12 Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Work while the opportunity presents itself (John 9:4)

> 4 As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.

Deliverance through God's Victory (Judges 3:19-25)

19 But he himself turned back from the stone images that were at Gilgal, and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." He said, "Keep silence!" And all who attended him went out from him.
20 So Ehud came to him (now he was sitting upstairs in his cool private chamber). Then Ehud said, "I have a message from God for you." So he arose from his seat.
21 Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly.
22 Even the hilt went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the dagger out of his belly; and his entrails came out.
23 Then Ehud went out through the porch and shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them.

Victory through enticement (19-20)

God sometimes allows enticement (1 Kings 22:19-22)

19 Micaiah continued, "Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne with all the host of heaven standing around him on his right and on his left. 20 And the Lord said, 'Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?' "One suggested this, and another that. 21 Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the Lord and said, 'I will entice him.' 22 " 'By what means?' the Lord asked. " 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his prophets,' he said. " 'You will succeed in enticing him,' said the Lord. 'Go and do it.'

Man is enticed and influenced by his own evil desires (James 1:14)

14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

A violent man is accustomed to enticement (Prov 16:29)

29 A violent man entices his neighbor and leads him down a path that is not good.

Enticement to listen to what God has said (Mic 6:9)

9 Listen! The Lord is calling to the city — and to fear your name is wisdom — "Heed the rod and the One who appointed it.

Victory through escape (21-23)

Way of escape from temptation (1 Cor 10:13)

13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Way of escape provided by the Creator (Ps 124:7-8)

7 We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken, and we have escaped. 8 Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Way of escape because God has the Master Plan (Jer 29:11)

11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Way of escape where we are protected (Num 35:11-13)

11 select some towns to be your cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone accidentally may flee. 12 They will be places of refuge from the avenger, so that a person accused of murder may not die before he stands trial before the assembly. 13 These six towns you give will be your cities of refuge.

Way of escape that can be from unusual sources (Josh 2:15-16)

15 So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. 16 Now she had said to them, "Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way."

Deliverance through God's Peace (Judges 3:30)

30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for eighty years.

Peace that God provides (30)

Peace that only God alone can bring (Ps 4:8)

8 I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

Peace that gives strength to His people (Ps 29:11)

> 11 The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.

Peace to our borders (Ps 147:14)

> 14 He grants peace to your borders and satisfies you with the finest of wheat.

Peace that comes as a part of the Kingdom of God (Rom 14:17-18)

> 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

Peace that comes from the God of peace (1 Thess 5:23)

> 23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Ehud's 'Gut Reaction' (Judges 3:12-30)

We begin our consideration of Ehud and Eglon by noting that 70% (if my math is correct) of our text for this message is devoted to Ehud and the deliverance of Israel from Eglon and the oppressive rule of Moab (allied with the Ammonites and Amalekites). It is our task to discern why God would place so much emphasis on this deliverance, while giving so much less attention to Othniel, and one mere verse (one sentence) to Shamgar. The answer to this will be the key to understanding our text.

The story begins with the reader being informed that the Israelites **"*again*"** did evil in the sight of the Lord. The pattern of cycles set forth in chapter 2 is played out in chapter 3. It is also significant, I think, that we are told that the Israelites did evil **"*in the sight of the Lord*"** (verse 12). The author wants us to be very aware of the fact that every man was doing what was right in his own eyes.[8] I am inclined to think that the Israelites initially went about the evil they were practicing without even realizing that it was evil. After all, it was what Canaanites did, and they had inter-mingled and inter-married with them. In response to Israel's sin, God disciplined them by "strengthening Eglon against Israel." Imagine this; God was giving the enemy the upper hand over Israel. Instead of strengthening Israel so that they could defeat the Moabites, God strengthened the Moabites so that the Israelites would be oppressed. This, of course, was exactly what God had warned:

25 "The Lord will allow you to be struck down before your enemies; you will attack them from one direction but flee from them in seven directions and will become an object of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth" (Deuteronomy 28:25; see also Joshua 23:15-16).

I am calling attention to the fact that God strengthened the Moabites because I believe it is an important clue to the interpretation of our text. To a wayward and disobedient nation (as Israel was at this moment in time), their defeat and oppression would have looked like an unfortunate turn of events ("bad luck"), rather than the discipline of God because of Israel's sin. Sin dulls our hearts and minds so that we are oblivious to the presence of sin and even the working of God in our lives and circumstances. Indeed, not only did Israel's defeat look "normal," so too her subsequent victories under the leadership of Ehud could have been seen as good fortune and no more except for this account.

As usual, when God's people begin to suffer, they are quick to cry out to God for help. As we have seen before, this outcry was not necessarily (indeed not likely) a cry of repentance. How often do we **"cry out"** to God in our prayers in response to some painful event or circumstance in our lives? We want God to take away the pain and to fix the problem, but the possibility that we are facing the consequences of our own sin is often not at the forefront of our minds.

In response to the Israelite's cry for help, God raises up Ehud[9] to deliver His people. We are told several bits of information about Ehud. First, we are told that he was a Benjamite, a left-handed Benjamite no less.[10] This detail is not a frivolous one, added at the whim of the author. It is an important piece of background information, which will help us grasp the message of our text. Ehud is also the "bag man" selected to oversee the payoff of Eglon. Israel's tribute could have been in the form of gold or silver or agricultural products.[11]

We are also told that Ehud was "packing heat," a concealed weapon, a weapon that he himself made. It was a short 18-inch custom made sword or dagger that seemingly did not have the usual protective crosspiece designed to protect the hand of the sword-bearer. This is what facilitated the fatal jab which penetrated Eglon's body and protruded out the back.[12] The weapon was almost certainly designed as a "concealed weapon." Some would argue that it was specifically designed and created as the weapon with which to kill king Eglon, but this is not necessarily so. These were very dangerous days, days when one could be accosted and abused by some member of the occupying Moabite military. As we shall see from Judges 5:6, the highways may have been so dangerous that folks avoided them, using back roads and paths instead. Maybe Ehud was packing a concealed weapon for his own protection, like one of my students in a state prison where I taught for a short time. He was a rather quiet fellow, but he was being threatened by one or more inmates, and so he fashioned a "shiv" that he kept hidden on his person (until it was discovered).

I have long held that Christians can be afflicted by what I call the "pious bias." That is, they tend to put the most positive "spin" possible on the text, rather than to see it in more human (and sinful) terms. Thus, they try hard to find a way to make Jonah repentant in chapter 2, when in fact he never repents in the entire book. What I am saying is that our author supplies all of the detail necessary to make his point, but the absence of certain details affords the reader the opportunity to "fill in the blanks" with interpretations we prefer to believe, even if it didn't happen that way. Given the facts the author has supplied, I could come away thinking of Ehud as a very courageous fellow who planned and orchestrated the death of Eglon and the defeat of the Moabites (with God's help). But we could also think of Ehud as a less than courageous fellow, something like Gideon. Through a series of providential interventions, Ehud found himself in the right place at the right time. He cooperated with God, but it was God who was "pulling the strings."

I would suggest that we should not be too quick to assume that Ehud was a hero in waiting, especially in the context of the entire Book of Judges. Our author is not trying to cast the spotlight on heroes for us to glorify, but to focus our attention on God. When we have finished reading this account, we should be giving glory to God, not to men.

I would propose that the author has very skillfully kept some details from the reader, while he has very carefully woven only pertinent details into the story. Our task is to discover why the author left out things we would like to know while including information we would rather not have learned. Here are some of the critical details provided in our text which are like the pieces of a puzzle; we need to figure out where each peace fits, and then take a good look at the resulting picture. Crucial details would include Eglon's girth, his naïve actions (sending out his servants/security), and allowing Ehud to be alone with him. Other important details would include the twice-mentioned carved idols outside the city, the design of the palace with its **"cool room,"** Ehud's left-handedness and his dagger, and the location of the palace near the Jordan. We will seek to find the meaning of all this in a moment, but first let us turn our attention to Shamgar, a man who gets a whole lot less attention in our text (but don't forget the mention of him in 5:6).

(Adapted from URL:https://bible.org/seriespage/4-ehuds-gut-reaction-or-no-guts-no-gory-judges-35-31)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

King Eglon fell to a single blow without struggle, the fatal stroke made by a man he failed to perceive as a threat. The secret "message" was a verdict of judgment executed by Israel's deliverer: the oppression of God's people was terminated. Although the Israelites once again had done evil in God's sight, when they cried to him in their misery, he faithfully answered (Judges 3:12, 15). Ehud's proficiency with his left hand especially positioned him in this situation. He faithfully honed his unique talents and bravely used them when God asked him to move on Israel's behalf. Ehud's story, like all of Israel's judges, illustrates the cycle God's people repeated time and time again after the era of Joshua's leadership. Through the judges, God showcases his desire for partnership with humanity. Although God seeks, saves, empowers, and redeems, he often desires to employ people in the process. Sometimes he finds a willing person (example: Isaiah 6:8), sometimes he finds a reluctant person (example: Exodus 4:13), and sometimes he finds no one (Ezekiel 22:30). There is a cliché in Christian circles that says, "God does not call the qualified; he qualifies the called." Sometimes, God prepares people for work they will do long before they know the details. Ehud emerged to solve an eighteen-year-long subjugation. He planned diligently before acting boldly. Waiting upon the Lord is a fundamental exercise of faith, and it can take years before the Lord's solution arrives. In the meantime, we must keep the faith, follow the commands he gives, and trust the work he is doing.