

# **Commentary on Judges 3:15-25, 29-30**

**By L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.**

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Series*) for **Sunday, July 17, 2011**, is from **Judges 3:15-25, 29-30**. Five **Questions for Discussion** follow the *Bible Lesson Commentary* below.

## **Judges 3:15-25**

**(Judges 3:15)** But when the Israelites cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud son of Gera, the Benjaminite, a left-handed man. The Israelites sent tribute by him to King Eglon of Moab.

The Israelites cried out to the LORD only because of their suffering at the hands of their enemies, and not because they had come to the conclusion that God was worthy to be praised in contrast to the idols they had turned to worship. In some cases, they worshiped the false gods of their enemies as well as their neighbors. When they finally remembered how the LORD had helped their ancestors, they called out to God in their distress. God helped them by raising up a particularly qualified leader called a judge. Ehud, and later King Saul, came from the tribe of Benjamin. After God saved them, that generation worshiped the LORD as the one true God.

**(Judges 3:16)** Ehud made for himself a sword with two edges, a cubit in length; and he fastened it on his right thigh under his clothes.

Because Ehud was left-handed, he could conceal a sword by fastening it to his right thigh. He crafted a sword with two edges so the sword could cut easily when swung right or left. In addition, a two-edges sword could penetrate easier when thrust forward. A cubit is from 14 inches to 18 inches in length. The shorter length would have been preferred because it could be concealed easier under Ehud's clothing (it would not be looked for by most guards on his right side).

**(Judges 3:17)** Then he presented the tribute to King Eglon of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man.

"Tribute" is another name for a tax imposed upon the conquered by their conquerors, because Ehud certainly did not intend to commend King Eglon for oppressing the Israelites. In the days of Jesus' earthly ministry, the Romans collected tribute from the Jews using tax collectors, whom the Jews despised. The writer sets the stage for what Ehud will do by emphasizing that Eglon was fat.

**(Judges 3:18)** When Ehud had finished presenting the tribute, he sent the people who carried the tribute on their way.

The tribute was what the people of the land could produce, along with precious stones or metals that the King might require (which might make trading with

other countries essential to acquire the more portable wealth of gold or silver). However, the King might also require food items in sufficient in quantity to feed his court, so sheep and goats and grains might be brought as part of the tribute. Ehud sent those who helped bring the tribute away for their protection, so they could escape quickly, especially if his plan failed.

**(Judges 3:19) But he himself turned back at the sculptured stones near Gilgal, and said, “I have a secret message for you, O king.” So the king said, “Silence!” and all his attendants went out from his presence.**

As Ehud and those who bore the tribute left, Ehud turned back, thus giving those who accompanied him the ability to naturally keep on going and escape the Moabites. Probably, the LORD put into King Eglon’s mind the idea that it would be safe for him to dismiss his guards so he could learn the message in secret (especially since he had just received “tribute” from Ehud) .

**(Judges 3:20) Ehud came to him, while he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber, and said, “I have a message from God for you.” So he rose from his seat.**

The chamber on the roof made it possible for a cool breeze to cool those inside. The king’s palace, with this elevated room, probably stood as the highest building in the city, so nothing could have blocked a cool breeze. Ehud claimed to have a message from God for Eglon, and in his arrogance King Eglon probably assumed any message from God for him would be good news! He probably stood up with excitement to hear the good news from God.

**(Judges 3:21) Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into Eglon’s belly;**

Since most soldiers were right-handed, if Ehud was searched at all it did not appear that he was armed. There was no visible sword on his left side for him to draw with his right hand. However, being left-handed, he could easily reach under the folds of his robe and quickly draw the two-edged sword that was hidden on his right leg.

**(Judges 3:22) the hilt also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the sword out of his belly; and the dirt came out.**

Since the sword was a sharp, two-edged sword, Ehud easily thrust it into the stomach of Eglon. The thrust was so deep, and Eglon was so fat, that his sword disappeared inside him and in the folds of his fat. Ehud wisely did not withdraw the sword, which would have left evidence upon him and revealed to anyone who saw him that he had committed a crime as he left the palace.

**(Judges 3:23) Then Ehud went out into the vestibule, and closed the doors of the roof chamber on him, and locked them.**

Anyone could have seen Ehud leave the palace, and probably did. If they did see him, they saw no evidence of his having shed blood or soiled himself. If they saw him close and lock the doors, they could have assumed that Eglon told him to do so. If caught and questioned, he was leaving unarmed and not with a bloody sword. He made a clean getaway.

**(Judges 3:24) After he had gone, the servants came. When they saw that the doors of the roof chamber were locked, they thought, “He must be relieving himself in the cool chamber.”**

When the servants went to the doors that Ehud had locked (and perhaps had locked from the inside to escape another way through a different vestibule), they had no suspicion that Eglon had been killed. It surely seems that since God had raised up Ehud to be a judge that God helped Ehud fulfill his task and safely escape. God could easily fill their minds with misleading assumptions to give Ehud time to be far away from the palace before Eglon’s body was discovered. His servants respected the privacy that the king demanded from them.

**(Judges 3:25) So they waited until they were embarrassed. When he still did not open the doors of the roof chamber, they took the key and opened them. There was their lord lying dead on the floor.**

The servants waited until they felt their lack of attention to King Eglon might indicate neglect and lack of concern for his welfare. When Eglon did not open the door and call for them, they eventually felt they needed to see if he needed anything from them. (Ehud had carefully left the key in place, if he had escaped through the only door and vestibule, so all would seem normal.) When they entered the chamber, they found Eglon dead on the floor where he had fallen.

### **Judges 3:29-30**

**(Judges 3:29) At that time they killed about ten thousand of the Moabites, all strong, able-bodied men; no one escaped.**

After Ehud left Moab, he called God’s people to war, to escape from the oppression of the Moabites. While they were without a king to lead them, and while they wondered if their gods had forsaken them in the death of their king, God used Ehud to raise an army to kill the strongest and best prepared in the Moabite army. God did not kill the Moabite army using a miracle; such as raining hailstones upon them. Rather, God helped the Israelites destroy their enemy in battle.

**(Judges 3:30) So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest eighty years.**

After Moab was subdued, the people no longer had to suffer oppression or pay taxes to a foreign enemy. They had rest from persecution and the LORD's discipline for eighty years, at the end of which they had turned away from God once again to worship the false gods of their enemies and neighbors.

### **Five Questions for Discussion**

1. Why do you think God used a variety of different types of judges and a variety of ways to free the Israelites from oppression? For examples, compare Ehud to Joshua or Gideon or Samson.
2. Why do you think God almost always used the Israelites in battle to free His people from their oppressors rather than just doing it himself in some astonishing and obviously miraculous ways (as He had freed His people from Pharaoh and the Egyptian army).
3. Why do you think the Israelites so quickly turned away from the LORD to worship the idols of their neighbors? Do people today ever turn away from God to serving idols? If so, why do you think they do so?
4. What more did the judges need to do, or should have done, to help the Israelites stay true to the LORD after God used them to free His people from their oppressors?
5. How did the Israelites recognize a judge as a God-appointed leader? How can we recognize God-appointed leaders and/or potential leaders today?

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