

## **“Here Comes the Judge!”**

### **A Study on the Old Testament Book of Judges**

**Session 3    October 7, 2020**

**Ehud and Shamgar**

**Judges 3:12 – 30, Judges 3:31**

#### **Recap: The Judges’ Cycle**

The Judges’ Cycle (found in Judges Chapter 2, verses 10 through 19) is as follows...

1. The tribes of Israel rebel against God, often worshipping the gods of the people of Canaan (Baal, Ashtaroth, etc.)
2. God is provoked to anger by the Israelites actions, and allows another people group to rise up and invade, plunder, or oppress the tribes of Israel.
3. The distress causes the tribes of Israel to cry out to the Lord, asking for repentance for their actions.
4. God sends rescue through a chosen leader, a “judge” to put down the oppressors, creating a time of peace for the tribes.
5. When the “judge” dies, the tribes once again turn away from God and rebel again.

#### **Session 2 Recap**

In Session 2, we were introduced to the first Judge in the book of Judges, Othniel (of the Judah tribe). He was called by God to rise up against Cushan-rishathaim, the king of Aram (Mesopotamia), after the tribes of Israel turned their back on God. The tribes of Israel were under oppression for 8 years before they called out to God for help. Othniel ushered in a time of peace for 40 years.

#### **Session 3: Ehud, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Judge**

**Judges 3:12 - 30**

##### **(1) Cycle Step One: Judges 3:12**

After 40 years of peace under Othniel, the first judge passes away. Immediately we are told that “sons of Israel” did evil in the sight of the Lord. We are not told specifically what “evil” they did, but we would assume it reflects the same actions – turning their back on God and worshipping other gods/idols. The actions were flagrant enough that God once again allows an oppressor to rise, this time Eglon, king of Moab.

## **(2) Cycle Step Two: Judges 3:12 – 14**

While Eglon was the leader, we see that God (in his anger) allows an alliance of oppressors to form to overrun Israel. Eglon called in assistance from the sons (tribes) of Ammon and Amalek. These three groups – the Moabites, Ammonites, and Amalekites – were nomadic tribes that resided usually in the east of Canaan. Known for their military skill, these nomadic raiders were able to overtake the “city of the palm trees” – Jericho. Jericho was a “holy” site for the Israelite tribes, a place of victory for Joshua (Joshua 6). This raid was the first example of nations outside of Canaan, the Promised Land, attacking the Israelite tribes.

The years of oppression was eighteen years in total. Notice that this time period is longer than the previous oppression (an often reoccurring theme in Judges). Notice that God “strengthened” Eglon so he could overtake the tribes of Israel. Scripture emphasizes that God was in control.

## **(3) Cycle Step Three: Judges 3:15**

The tribes of Israel cried out to the Lord after eighteen years of oppression. Once again, God hears their cries and he raises up a deliverer in the person of Ehud.

## **(4) Cycle Step Four: Judges 3:15 – 29**

Ehud was the son of Gera, from the tribe of Benjamin. An interesting detail in describing Ehud is that he was “left handed”. To the modern reader, this seems like an extraneous detail – something that sets Ehud apart. However, in the time of Judges, a left-handed individual was often seen as “disabled” or “handicapped”. Some biblical scholars believe that Ehud had an injury/paralysis with his right hand. Other biblical scholars believe that Ehud was a part of special Benjaminite tribe of warriors who were skilled to be ambidextrous. In biblical times, the “right hand” was often the symbol of power and ability. Most biblical warriors wielded their swords or weapons in their right hand. To the outside eye, Ehud being left-handed would limit, even prevent, him from fighting in battle. (Another interesting side note, the tribe of Benjamin – Ehud’s familial tribe – literally means “son of the right hand”. Irony...)

Ehud is sent by the tribes of Israel, along with a delegation of additional representatives, to pay tribute (a burdensome tax of money or product, used to

remind the oppressed who is in charge) to King Eglon, who had wielded authority over the tribes for eighteen years. Ehud, however, is a sly and cunning warrior. He straps a double-edged sword to his right thigh. Anyone delivering tributes to the king would have their weapons taken before entering. Ehud, realizing that the Moabites would judge him because of his left-handedness, hides the sword for the correct time.

Another interesting detail is now given – Eglon was a “very fat man”. This detail will come back to assist Ehud. In Hebrew, Eglon literally means “young bull or fatted calf”. After delivering the tributes to Eglon, Ehud sends away the other representatives to return “home”. Ehud returns to deliver a secret message to Eglon. The story shares that Ehud “turned back from the idols of Gilgal”, a symbolic notion of he (and the tribes of Israel) to turn away from their idol worship. Since Ehud was “left handed” and assumed unable to be a threat to the king, he is left alone to deliver the message. This is highly unusual and only allowed by Eglon and the Moabites because of their outward perception of Ehud.

Once alone, Ehud shares that he had a “message from God” for Eglon. Ehud, using his left hand, drives the sword into the belly of the overweight king. One would assume the disturbance of stabbing the king would bring in the guards who were dismissed shortly before. However, Ehud escaped and locked the doors behind him. The guards come to check on Eglon, but they assume that he was “relieving himself”. One translation describes the stabbing to the point that “the dung came out”. The smell and the locked door provides ample time for Ehud to escape. After delaying for a while, the servants finally unlock the door to check on the king and he lie dead. Ehud is again described as “passing by the idols” on his escape.

Ehud’s call as a “judge” is not done. After returning to Ephraim and the hill country of the tribes of Israel, Ehud summons the tribes of Israel. Had Ehud just come as a “left handed” warrior judge, many of the tribes’ warriors would not have followed him. However, since he alone assassinated King Eglon, the tribes were ready to listen. They proceed to the fork of the Jordan River, directly across from the Moabite territory. This tactical move would prevent any of the Moabite warriors from escaping. The tribes of Israel then kill 10,000 Moabite warriors, allowing no one to escape. Ehud emphasizes, “the Lord has given your enemies into your hands”. Just as God “delivered” Israel into the Moabite hands, now God “delivers” the Moabites into the hands of the Israelites.

## **(5) Cycle Step Five: Judges 3:30**

Ehud led the tribes of Israel into a peaceful period of eighty years (2 generations).

### **Shamgar, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Judge – Judges 3:31**

Shamgar is the first of six minor judges that are described in the Old Testament book. Unlike most of the other judges, Shamgar is not identified by a certain tribe. Listed as the “son of Anath”, Shamgar is not a typical Hebrew name. “Anath” is the name of a female Canaanite goddess. Some biblical scholars believe that Shamgar may be a foreign mercenary who joined and led the tribes of Israel for a time.

Understanding the Judges’ cycle, we can assume the tribes did evil in the sight of the Lord. As a response, God allows the Philistines to oppress the Israelites. After crying out to God, He calls Shamgar to rise up against the Philistines. Similar to Ehud, the only detail we are given about Shamgar is that he killed 600 Philistines with an “ox goad”. An ox goad was a farming tool used to spur or guide livestock. As a tool, an ox goad was a long stick with a pointed end. Unlike Ehud who uses stealth, one can assume that Shamgar relies on his strength. Deborah will later celebrate the time period of Shamgar in Judges Chapter 5.

### **Questions to Reflect On...**

*When have you experienced God using an “unexpected” person to do “unexpected” things, like the judge Ehud?*

*Others overlooked Ehud because of his left-handedness. What gift has God blessed you with that others might overlook? Could God be challenging you to use this “hidden gift” to honor or serve Him?*

### **Next Week...**

**“Here Comes the Judge” – Session 4**

**Wednesday, October 14 6:30 PM**

**Focus – Deborah**

**Judges 4:1 – 5:31**