

### Ehud and Shamgar

#### Judges 3:12-31

Judges 3:12-31 - *"And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD strengthened Eglon king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD. <sup>13</sup> Then he gathered to himself the people of Ammon and Amalek, went and defeated Israel, and took possession of the City of Palms. <sup>14</sup> So the children of Israel served Eglon king of Moab eighteen years.*

*<sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> So he brought the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. (Now Eglon was a very fat man.) <sup>18</sup> And when he had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who had carried the tribute. <sup>19</sup> 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.*

*<sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> Then Ehud went out through the porch and shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them.*

*<sup>24</sup> When he had gone out, Eglon's servants came to look, and to their surprise, the doors of the upper room were locked. So they said, "He is probably attending to his needs in the cool chamber." <sup>25</sup> So they waited till they were embarrassed, and still he had not opened the doors of the upper room. Therefore they took the key and opened them. And there was their master, fallen dead on the floor.*

*<sup>26</sup> But Ehud had escaped while they delayed, and passed beyond the stone images and escaped to Seirah. <sup>27</sup> And it happened, when he arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the mountains of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mountains; and he led them. <sup>28</sup> Then he said to them, "Follow me, for the LORD has delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand." So they went down after him, seized the fords of the Jordan leading to Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross over. <sup>29</sup> And at that time they killed about ten thousand men of Moab, all stout men of valor; not a man escaped. <sup>30</sup> So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for eighty years.*

*<sup>31</sup> After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed six hundred men of the Philistines with an ox goad; and he also delivered Israel."*

## Background Notes

How many Judges did Israel have? Answer: between twelve and fifteen, depending on whom you count. If you count Barak as a judge (along with Deborah), and if you count Abimelech (who was actually an evil ruler), and if you count Samuel (who was really more of a prophet than a judge), then you come out with fifteen.

Some judges overlapped in time. For example, Samson's time as a judge seems to have overlapped with the judges Elon and Abdon, but they judged in different parts of the land. In the second half of Judges 3 we have Ehud and Shamgar. Shamgar followed Ehud (v31), but apparently Shamgar began to rule before Ehud died (Judges 4:1). So there was some overlap with Ehud and Shamgar. Maybe Shamgar judged only a part of Israel.

In any case, here in the second half of Judges 3 we have the **second sin cycle** of the period of the judges. The Moabites were the enemy that God allowed to invade Israel, and they oppressed Israel for eighteen years. Eglon was the king of Moab, and he set up his throne in Jericho, the City of Palms (v13). Moab suppressed Israel by making them pay tribute in gold or silver to Moab.

Ehud was designated by Israel to head up the delegation that was appointed to bring the tribute payment to the king of Moab. Ehud saw this occasion as an opportunity to overthrow this ungodly foreign power that had set up headquarters in the Israeli city of Jericho. After killing Eglon, Ehud escaped to the mountains of Ephraim, rallied the troops of Israel, and they defeated the Moabites.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. **“The flesh not held in check” is not a pleasant picture.**

You're probably thinking, “Where in the world do you get that doctrinal point out of this passage?” It's in the spiritual picture that has been drawn here for us. In the books of Joshua and Judges the land of Canaan, which was the land of Promise for Israel, represents the land of blessing that God has for the believer. As God had given the land of Canaan to His people Israel, so God has given us a land of spiritual blessing. But Israel had to drive out the enemy in order to enjoy the blessings of the land, and so we have to drive out our enemy to enjoy our spiritual blessings in Christ in the spiritual land that God has given us.

Israel was guaranteed victory in the Promised Land if they would fully follow and obey the Lord. In the same way, we are guaranteed victory in spiritual warfare if we fully follow and obey the Lord. Who is our enemy? Satan is our enemy. He uses this sinful world system, and the strong desires of our sinful “flesh,” and even demonic forces to keep us defeated, and to keep us from enjoying our blessings in Christ.

In the spiritual picture in Judges 3, Eglon is the picture of “the flesh not held in check.” “The flesh” is our sinful nature, and our sinful natures must be held in check.

Follow the picture: Eglon was the king of Moab. Who were the Moabites? The nation of Moab began as a result of the incestuous relationship between Lot and one of his two daughters (Genesis 19:30-38). In the case of Lot and his daughters, the flesh certainly **was not** held in check.

Even the very physical appearance of Eglon adds to the spiritual picture: “*Now Eglon was a very fat man*” (v17). Eglon was a vivid picture of “the flesh not held in check.” So here you have big, fat king Eglon of Moab sitting on his throne in Jericho. Jericho, of all places! Jericho was part of the land that Israel had already conquered - but now it was back again under enemy control.

What a picture of “the flesh not held in check” – and it’s not a pleasant picture! How true this is in the Christian life. When we don’t hold the our sinful nature in check, we begin to lose ground that had already been conquered for Christ. It’s not a pretty picture when the flesh begins to control our lives. “The flesh not held in check” is not a pleasant picture.

## **2. Cutting off the flesh is not a pleasant picture.**

Verses 21-22: “*Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. 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.*” Now that is not a pleasant picture, is it? You use these verses as Sunday school memory verses!

Why did God include these ugly details in the Bible? It is because of the spiritual picture. We’ve seen that big, fat Eglon is a spiritual picture of “the flesh not held in check.” Getting rid of Eglon is a spiritual picture of “cutting off the flesh.” Cutting off the flesh is not a pleasant experience. In fact, dealing with the flesh can be quite ugly! Colossians 3:5: “*Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust evil desires and greed, which is idolatry...*” And verse 8: “*You must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language out of your mouth.*” These verses describe cutting off the flesh, or putting the knife to the flesh and its ugly sins.

How do you “cut off the flesh”? We cut off the flesh by applying the Word of God to our lives. We allow the double-edged sword of the Scriptures to do its spiritual surgery in our lives. Hebrews 4:12 says, “*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*” So “keeping the flesh in check” and “cutting off the flesh” is a matter of applying the Word of God to every area of our lives.

I don’t think it’s over-spiritualizing to see Ehud’s double-edged sword (v16) as representing the Word of God in our spiritual picture. When we apply the Word of God to our sinful natures, we realize how just ugly and gross the sinful nature really is. So there’s at least one good reason why God included the gross details of Eglon’s death in Holy Scripture. Cutting off the flesh is not a pleasant picture.

## **Practical Applications**

### **1. God can use you, regardless of your differences.**

How many of you are left-handed, as I am? Left-handed people sometimes feel abnormal or different. After all, it's a right-handed world, and everything seems to be made with right-handers in mind. We left-handers even have to use scissors upside down or backwards!

Did you know that Ehud was left-handed? God used this difference as an advantage. Ehud fastened his two-edged dagger on his right thigh (v16), so when he reached for it with his left hand Eglon didn't suspect what he was doing. If Ehud had reached into his clothes with his right hand, Eglon would have been on his guard. So God used Ehud's "difference" as an advantage.

God can use your differences as well! So if you ever feel that you're not like everybody else - your personality, your education, your appearance, your socio-economic situation, or any other area - remember this application from Ehud.

God can use you, regardless of your differences!

## **2. God can use you, regardless of your background.**

In verse 31 we have the record of Shamgar, the son of Anath: *"After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed six hundred men of the Philistines with an ox goad; and he also delivered Israel."* An ox goad, by the way, was a pole with a spike on the end that was used for prodding oxen. God empowered Shamgar to use a common ox goad to deliver Israel from oppression by the Philistines!

The names Shamgar and Anath were not Hebrew names. Shamgar was a Canaanite name, and Anath was the name of a Canaanite god. This seems to indicate that Shamgar didn't have a godly background, in contrast with Othniel, for example. But God used Shamgar, regardless of his background!

God can use you, too - regardless of your background! If you've had a godly heritage like Othniel, you can thank the Lord for your background. However, if you didn't have a godly heritage, and you didn't grow up in a Christian home or church, don't think that God can't use you. There's a great lesson for us, just from looking at the names of Shamgar and Anath.

God can use you greatly -- regardless of your background!