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The Second Cycle: **Ehud**

3: 12-30

The second cycle: Ehud DIG: What is the theme of the story of Ehud? What is the significance of knowing that Ehud was ambidextrous? What is the victory that Ha'Shem gave through Ehud? What is the tragedy of the story? How did the Israelites go through the different steps of the cycle with Ehud as the deliverer?

REFLECT: What do you think of Ehud's plan and behavior? Do the means justify the ends? Would you allow your daughter to date Ehud? Do you admire him for his bravery or detest him for his deception? Where in your life would you like to experience God's answer to one of your cries?

The judgment of God's enemies in the past, assures God's people that He will judge His enemies in the future.

Rebellion (3:12a): As with the account of **Othniel** (to see link click [Ap - The First Cycle: Othniel](#)) and the other major **judges**, the account of **Ehud** (pronounced A-hood) begins with the revelation that **once again the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of ADONAI (3:12a ESV)**. But unlike the account of **Othniel**, the precise nature of this **evil** is not identified, even though the introduction (see [Al - Judgement for the Incomplete Conquest](#)), and the first example of **Othniel**, suggests it was the worship of other foreign gods.⁶⁹

Retribution (3:12b-14): Next the author introduces **Isra'el's** new oppressor. **So ADONAI gave Eglon, king of Mo'ab, power over Isra'el, because of the evil they had done (3:12b Hebrew)**. It was **God** who energized **Eglon** to be the oppressor against **Isra'el** even though **they** were **His people**. **King Eglon enlisted the Ammorites and the Amalekites as allies, and then he went out and defeated Isra'el, taking possession of Jericho, the city of palms (3:13 NLT)**. **Jericho** had been destroyed by **Joshua** about sixty years earlier, **it** had been rebuilt, but not as **a fortified city**, and therefore it did not violate the curse of **Joshua 6:26**. **The Israelites were subject to Eglon, king of Mo'ab for**

eighteen years (3:14 NIV).

Repentance (3:15a): As in other major sections in **Judges**, the plot turns when **Isra'el** cries out to **YHVH**. **But when the Israelites cried out to ADONAI, He raised up one who would rescue them (3:15a Hebrew). The Israelites cried out to YHVH** for deliverance as **their ancestors cried out to God in Egypt (Ex 2:23)**. But again, this was not a cry of **repentance** or a plea for forgiveness; it was simply a cry of pain, a plea for divine help.

Restoration (3:15b-29): The restoration of **Isra'el** came in **two stages**.

First, the Assassination of Eglon (3:15b-26): Ehud the son of Gera the Benjamite, the deliverer, was primarily **left-handed**, although according to **First Chronicles 12:2, the Benjamites** were also known to be fierce warriors and *ambidextrous*. **Now Ehud had a double-edged dagger, without a cross-shaft, about eighteen inches long and strapped it to his right thigh under his clothing (3:16 NLT).** The advantage of **Ehud**, being ambidextrous, was that **he** could **strap his dagger** to **his** right side, the opposite of the side that **he** usually carried **it** so **he** could conceal **his** weapon. **The king's** guards would have searched **his** left side where **they** would have expected **a dagger** to be. **Ehud's** plan for assassinating **Eglon** was a masterpiece of strategy.⁷⁰

Ehud had several problems to solve before assassinating **King Eglon**. First, **he** gained access to **the king** without making **his** guards suspicious. **He** accomplished this by making **himself** the leader of the group that brought **the king his annual tribute**. Seeing strangers at that time would not be unusual. **The Israelites sent Ehud with tribute to Eglon, king of Mo'ab (3:15b NLT).** Paying **tribute** would not only add to **the king's** wealth, but it would also acknowledge **the king's** authority over **Isra'el**. **Eglon** didn't know **Ehud** was **God's** appointed **judge** to deliver **Isra'el**; or **he** would have had **him** killed on the spot.⁷¹

Second, **Ehud** had to secure a private audience with **the king** without raising the suspicions of **his** guards. The way **he** did that was first by leaving **the king's** presence together with **his** men after **they** had paid homage to **Eglon**. Then **Ehud** came back later *alone* as if **he** had **a secret message for the king**. **He presented the tribute to Eglon, who was very fat,** which provides the explanation for the account that follows. **After delivering the**

tribute, Ehud started home with those who had carried the tribute. But when Ehud reached the quarries near Gilgal, he dismissed those with him and turned back (3:17-19a NLT). The Hebrew word for **quarries** is *psillim*, which means *sculptured statues*. They were *sculptured statues* of Canaanite gods, which illustrates **Isra'el's** problem and the reason for **her** slavery in the first place. The *sculptured statues* of Canaanite gods were at **Gilgal**, which means **they** were erected at the very same place where **Joshua** had erected **the memorial stones** in honor of what **God** had done for **Isra'el** (see **Joshua Av – The Memorial Stones at Gilgal**). They were also erected in the place where **The Angel of ADONAI** had already departed, and may have been the reason for **His** departure from **Gilgal**. So, **Ehud**, after leaving **Jericho**, went as far as **Gilgal**, and then **he turned back**. Then comes the trap.

Again, the story moves swiftly, from **Ehud's turning back** to **his** arrival, once more, in the cool **upper room** of the palace complex. This was a higher room that would allow the cool afternoon breezes to come through. It would have been a one-room apartment built on the corner of a flat roof, fitted on all sides with latticed windows, which shut out the sun in the heat of the day, but allowed for some privacy. In the summer time, it would have been the coolest part of the palace. This kind of **upper room** also tended to serve as a guest room (**First Kings 17:19** and **23; Second Kings 4:10-11**), or as a guest room of a palace (**Second Kings 1:2**). Often it was a very large **room** (**Jeremiah 22:13-14**).⁷²

To accomplish **his** mission **Ehud** first had to get **Elgon** to dismiss **his servants**, which **he** did by saying: **I have a secret message for you**. This required a private audience with **the king**, something that **Elgon** (**his** curiosity aroused) was ready to give. **So the king** dismissed **his servants** with just a single word: **Silence! They** needed nothing else **and** left at once, leaving **Ehud** and **Elgon** alone (**3:19 NLT**).

The assassin now had **the king** alone and vulnerable. **The judge of Isra'el** walked over to **Eglon**, who was sitting alone in a cool upstairs room and **Ehud** said to him, **"I have a message from Elohim for you"** (**3:20a NLT**). **Ehud** used the generic term **Elohim** which could apply to any deity, so **the king** might have thought it was **a message** from the Canaanite gods. At any rate, **Eglon** seemed to take **Ehud's** claim to be the bearer of a divine message, so out of respect **he** stood up to receive it. At that moment **he** had

perfectly positioned **himself** to receive **his** judgment from **the Jewish judge**. The plan had worked perfectly. **Ehud** had to assassinate **the king** in a way that was quick and quiet, and that would catch **him** by surprise. Unknowingly, **Eglon** (whose name means *small calf*) had presented **himself** to **Ehud** like a sacrificial animal, ready for the slaughter.

What happens next happens quickly, but as we have already observed, it's described in slow motion, almost like a series of still pictures rather than as one sudden action. At this point we are at the structural center of the narrative. There were **nine verses** before **verse 21** and there will be **nine verses** after **verse 21**. The assassination of **Eglon** is the hinge on which **the entire second cycle** turns. It was a heroic act, like **David's** slaughter of **Goliath**, which turns the tide and guarantees that it's only a matter of time until **the enemy** forces as a whole will be overthrown.⁷³



Ehud's divine message, however, was not from a pagan god, nor was it even in the form of words. **As King Eglon rose from his seat, Ehud reached out with his left hand** (as if to shake hands with **the king**), **drew the sword strapped to his right thigh** (with **his** right hand), **and plunged it into the king's belly**. **The sword went in so deep that the handle disappeared around the king's fat** (Hebrew: *cheleb*), **and his bowels emptied** (3:21-22 Hebrew). **The king** was so very **fat**, it took the whole **dagger**,

including the handle. The term translated **fat** is the sacrificial term used for the choicest parts of the sacrifice: **all the fat** (*cheleb*) **belongs to ADONAI** (see the commentary on **Leviticus Ak - The Peace Offerings: At Peace with God**). Ironically, then, **the king** being **fat** suggests that **Eglon** was a **fatted** calf ready for the slaughter. The downward motion of **the dagger** was with such force that it passed completely through **his** abdomen and projected from **his** anus. I think **Eglon** got the point of the message!

The narrator's silence on the role of **Ha'Shem** in the assassination of **Eglon** is deafening. Prior to **verse 28** there is no hint of any spiritual sensitivity in **Ehud's** heart, nor any sense of divine calling. On the contrary, **Ehud** operates like a typical Canaanite of **his** time - cleverly, opportunistically, and violently, apparently for **his** own glory. But the narrator doesn't seem to be concerned about the morality of the affair. He merely describes what happened from his point of view, and in doing so, reminds us that in the dark days of **the judges** the means necessary to restore **His people** were crude indeed.⁷⁴

The next problem was how to escape from the palace without getting caught. This was accomplished by **locking the door** to **the private upper room** and delaying the discovery of the corpse. **Then Ehud went out to the porch, closed and locked the doors of the upper room and escaped. After Ehud was gone, the king's servants returned and found the door to the upper room locked and assumed that he was using the bathroom. When the king didn't come out they finally overcame their fear of embarrassment, took a key and unlocked the door. There they found their master dead on the floor (3:23-25 Hebrew).** All this took time. **Ehud escaped while they delayed, and he passed beyond the memorial stone idols at Gilgal, which marked the end of Moabite territory and the beginning of Israelite territory. From there he escaped to Seirah to the central hill-country of Ephraim (3:26 ESV).**

And second, the Defeat of Mo'ab (3:27-29): **Ehud's** final problem was to rally **the Israelites** and attack **the enemy**. **When he arrived, he began sounding the call on the shofar**, which was often used in military contexts especially as a signal before and during a battle (**Joshua 6:4-20; Judges 6:34, 7:8, 16-22; Jeremiah 42:14; Hosea 5:8; Amos 2:2**), but here it is used to rally the troops for war. **And the people of Isra'el went down with him from the hill-country of Ephraim**, which included the tribal territory of **Benjamin**, and he was their leader. **The people of Isra'el** realized that it

was time to rebel against **the Moabites**. He said to them, “**Follow me, because ADONAI has given your enemy Mo’ab into your hands.**” This was a very deliberate public presentation of **himself** to **Isra’el** as **their judge/deliverer** in the present battle. It is also an excellent example of how at least some of **the people** named in **Chapters 3-16** became **judges**. **So they went down after him and seized the shallow crossings (fords) of the Jordan River and didn’t allow anyone to pass (3:27-28 Hebrew).** The victory would come by trusting **YHVH** and not by depending on **their** own strength. By guarding **the shallow crossings, the Israelites** prevented **the Moabites** from escaping or from bringing in fresh troops. Since **Ephraim** was one of the most powerful tribes in **Isra’el**, **Ehud** had excellent soldiers to command. Then the author summarizes the slaughter of **the Moabites**. **At that time they struck down about ten thousand Moabites, the most able-bodied men. No one escaped the sword (3:29 Hebrew).** We assume that **Mo’ab’s** defeat frightened **their** allies, **Ammon** and **Amalek**, and **they** fled the battlefield. It was a huge, overwhelming victory for **Isra’el**.⁷⁵

Rest (3:30): So Mo’ab was conquered by Isra’el that day, and there was rest in the land for eighty years (3:30 NLT). This round number is approximately two generations, and was the longest period of rest found in the entire book of **Judges**. Given that **the third cycle** of **Shamgar** that follows immediately has no separate period of **rest** indicated, it is possible that the **eighty years** includes both **Ehud** and **Shamgar**. It’s the longest period of **rest** which followed the subjugation of **Mo’ab** was threatened only once, and **Shamgar** successfully defeated that threat. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that the beginning of **the fourth cycle** refers back to **Ehud** rather than **Shamgar** as the one whose **death** signaled the end of the period of **rest (4:1)**.⁷⁶

As previously mentioned (see **Ae - The Cycle of Sin in Judges**) there is a downward moral cycle in each of the seven **judges** that are detailed. Each of the detailed **judges** except **Othniel**, the first one, presents us with a moral dilemma when evaluating **them**. In the case of **Othniel**, there is only a positive characterization. But starting with **Ehud**, there is a mixture of positive and negative attributes; with a decline of the positive and an increase in the negative as we go deeper into **the cycles**. This serves to highlight **ADONAI’s** mighty **restorations** despite the growing shortcomings of **His** human **deliverers**. In this case, **Ehud** clearly does not possess the moral character of **Othniel**. **He** resorts to a complex process of deception in order to accomplish **his** task. However, **Ehud** is not as

doubtful and manipulative as **Barak**, who is seen as more negative than **Ehud's**. So, for example, **Ehud** restores **Isra'el** by effectively assassinating the leader of **the enemy of God's people**; **Barak** will win a victory, but **the leader of the enemy** will escape **him**. Interestingly, and importantly, there will be more parallels between **Ehud** and **Jael (4:21-22)** than between **Ehud** and **Barak (4:12-16)**.⁷⁷

As related by Lawson Younger, Jr in his *NIV Application Commentary on Judges and Ruth*, this passage emphasizes the work of **ADONAI** in restoring **Isra'el, His firstborn son (Exodus 4:22)**. And this story (as many others throughout the Bible) demonstrates the length to which **God** will go in order to save **them** from slipping irreversibly into apostasy. **He** accomplishes this despite the moral flaws in **the human judges He** raises up. This serves, in turn, to demonstrate **His** mercy and compassion, since **Isra'el's repentance** is only temporary. Yet, **YHWH** hears the cry of pain and anguish of **His people** and acts on **their** behalf.

The judgment of **God's** enemies in the past assures **God's people** that **He** will **judge His enemies** in the future. Those who exploit, abuse, and seek to humiliate **His people** run the risk of humiliation by **YHWH Himself**. We can see this even today as those who have sought to destroy **Isra'el** have been humiliated. **Eglon** in particular, and **the Moabites** in general, had exploited **the Israelites for eighteen years**. The oppression brought **Isra'el** to the point of **crying out to ADONAI**, not in repentance, but in stress and pain. In **God's** compassion for **His people**, **He** raised up a **judge** who was willing, without any assurances, to risk **his** very life to save **Isra'el**. **The Jews** could not be saved from **Eglon**, without judgment on **Eglon**.

On a human level, our context is quite different today from **Isra'el's** day. Nevertheless, the question arises: How are we to wage spiritual warfare against those who abuse, exploit, and persecute the Church? And for believers in certain parts of the world today, this is not a hypothetical question, but a real and practical one. The only way we can win this spiritual battle is to use a better weapon we already have access to . . . **the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God** (see the commentary on [Ephesians Ch - The Sword of the Spirit](#)). **The sword is alive! It is at work and is sharper than any double-edged sword** (Greek: *machairan* meaning *a short dagger*) - **it cuts right through to where soul meets spirit and joints meet marrow (Hebrews 4:12a)**. This is not to allegorize the passage and equate **Ehud's dagger** with **the Word of God**. Rather, it is to acknowledge the role that the truth of the **Word** plays in the answer to the question posed above in the modern context.

Certainly the positive message of **Ehud** is in **his** willingness to risk **his** life for **ADONAI**. This is a lesson we can benefit from. So many believers today are hampered by an unwillingness to take any risk for **God** - to share their faith, to stand up for righteousness and justice, even to speak a word of encouragement to the demoralized - simply because we fear what others might say or think about us. **Ehud** demonstrates the kind of boldness of action for **the Lord** that should spur us to action in these types of situations.

Nevertheless, **Ehud's** method of deception cannot be condoned as the ideal way to accomplish **God's** will. While it heightens the suspense and functions to expose **Eglon** and **the Moabites** to greater satire, it poses a significant theological problem. While deceptive methods (whether in devious evangelistic methods, false prophecies, worldly church-growth methods, political involvement, etc.) may work, this should not be interpreted as **ADONAI's** condoning of such things. The ideal way is the way of integrity, the way in which **God** worked through **Othniel** to accomplish **His restoration** of **His people Isra'el** in **the first cycle**.⁷⁸

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise you for being such a loving heavenly **Father** who cares for me. **You** see all that happens to me. When hard times come into my life, **You** are right there, watching and seeking to use it to draw me closer to **Yourself**. Sometimes the trials/hard times come to help me grow strong in **You**. Just as **You** sent **Ehud** to rescue **Isra'el**, **You** sent **Messiah** to rescue me. Just as **You** hold **Isra'el** in the palm of **Your** hand, **You** hold me in the palm of **Your** hand. Just as **Isra'el** is **the apple of your eye**, **You** watch over and guard me. I know that **You** want only what is best for me, no matter what my walk with **You** looks like. **Father**, I love **You**; **Yeshua**, I love **You**, **Ruach Ha'Kodesh**, I love **You**. Thank you for **Your Presence** in my life. To **the One** what sits at **His** right hand. Amen*