

Judges 3:1 ¶ Now these *are* the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, *even* as many of Israel as had not known all the wars of Canaan;

Judges 3:2 Only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing thereof;

Judges 3:3 *Namely*, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baalhermon unto the entering in of Hamath.

Judges 3:4 And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.

This chapter opens with a set up and introduction to Israel's cycle of sin, judgment and deliverance by God through selected judges as He tries to draw them into a healthy relationship with Him.

We are told that certain nations were left to prove or test Israel's commitment to keep the commandments of the LORD as declared by Moses since many of this generation had not experienced the wars required to take possession of the land. The LORD intended to teach them war in hopes of making them appreciate what the LORD had given them.

The nations that God intended to use to test Israel were the five lords of the Philistines (the rulers of Gaza, Gath, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron), the Canaanites, the Sidonians (the Phoenicians) and the Hivites that lived in mount Lebanon from Baalhermon to Hamath.

Judges 3:5 And the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites, and Perizzites, and Hivites, and Jebusites:

Judges 3:6 And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

Judges 3:7 And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves.

Instead of going to war with these nations, the children of Israel chose to accept them as their neighbors; they even allowed intermarriage between their sons and daughters. Worst of all, they chose to serve their false gods—all in direct disobedience to God's command.

Deuteronomy 7:1–4 "When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it...thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them: Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly."

In no uncertain terms, the LORD described Israel's actions as evil in His sight because they had turned away from Him to serve Baalim and embrace the associated practices of worship enacted in the groves involving sexual immorality.

Judges 3:8 ¶ Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Chushanrishathaim eight years.

Judges 3:9 And when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel, who delivered them, *even* Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.

Judges 3:10 And the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushanrishathaim.

Judges 3:11 And the land had rest forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

"Mesopotamia" = the land between the two rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (today includes the eastern part of Syria and the northern part of Iraq)

The LORD was furious with His people for rejecting Him and blatantly disregarding His every command, so He allowed them to be conquered by the king of Mesopotamia. They were made to serve this king for eight years. As we so often do when we are in despair, they finally cried out to the LORD for help. Isn't it interesting that it took eight years before they were willing to humble themselves before the LORD and seek His help?

In His mercy the LORD raised up a deliverer in the person of Othniel, Caleb's younger brother or nephew, depending on how you read it. He had already proven himself as a warrior and leader when he conquered Kirjathsepher.

"The Spirit of the LORD came upon him" – This is a privilege that so many of us take for granted as Christians today. In Old Testament times the Spirit was only given to chosen people for chosen purposes. David feared losing God's Holy Spirit.

Psalms 51:10–11 "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me."

The Hebrew for "judged" (v10) includes to "govern...defend...rule." Empowered by the Holy Spirit as Israel's defender, Othniel led his people to war against the king of Mesopotamia and defeated him. The land then had rest for forty years, then Othniel died; so that peace lasted for the rest of Othniel's life.

I decided to do a bit more research on Othniel and found this in Chronicles to support the fact that he was Caleb's nephew.

1 Chronicles 4:13–15 "And the sons of Kenaz; Othniel, and Seraiah: and the sons of Othniel; Hathath. And Meonothai begat Ophrah: and Seraiah begat Joab, the father of the valley of Charashim; for they were craftsmen. And the sons of Caleb the son of Jephunneh...."

Principle (as demonstrated throughout scripture): The testimony and leadership of one man can make a powerful difference.

Judges 3:12 ¶ And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD.

Judges 3:13 And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees.

Judges 3:14 So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.

Judges 3:15 But when the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, the LORD raised them up a deliverer, Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man lefthanded: and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto Eglon the king of Moab.

Moab = east of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea, descendants of Lot

Ammon = northeast of Moab, descendants of Lot

Amalek = south of Moab, descendants of Esau

With Othniel's influence gone, Israel once again fell into wickedness. So the LORD strengthened Eglon, the king of Moab, to come against Israel. He allied himself with the people of Ammon and Amalek and went to war against Israel. He was successful and took possession of the city of palm trees, a reference to Jericho and its environs.

Deuteronomy 34:3 "...and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees...."

The children of Israel served this king for eighteen years before crying out to the LORD for mercy. (I thought it took them a long time the first time; this time it took ten more years than the first.)

In His mercy, the LORD raised up a delivered in the person of Ehud, a man from the tribe of Benjamin that was left handed. This was not an unusual trait in this tribe.

Judges 20:15–16 "And the children of Benjamin were numbered at that time out of the cities twenty and six thousand men that drew sword....Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men lefthanded;"

According to Clarke, the Septuagint translates this as being ambidextrous, or having equal use of both hands. There is also some scripture that supports this trait among the men of Benjamin.

1 Chronicles 12:2 "They were armed with bows, and could use both the right hand and the left in hurling stones and shooting arrows out of a bow, even of Saul's brethren of Benjamin."

I know that in some way the LORD gave Ehud the plan he implemented to defeat this king—whether by revelation or just gifting him with the intelligence

to formulate it. The plan included deception in connection with presenting Eglon with the tribute required from the people of Israel.

It's interesting to note that the LORD did not mention empowering Ehud with the Holy Spirit as He did Othniel. I think that is probably because this was more an operation of deception and physical fitness.

Judges 3:16 But Ehud made him a dagger which had two edges, of a cubit length; and he did gird it under his raiment upon his right thigh.

Judges 3:17 And he brought the present unto Eglon king of Moab: and Eglon was a very fat man.

Judges 3:18 And when he had made an end to offer the present, he sent away the people that bare the present.

Judges 3:19 But he himself turned again from the quarries that were by Gilgal, and said, I have a secret errand unto thee, O king: who said, Keep silence. And all that stood by him went out from him.

Judges 3:20 And Ehud came unto him; and he was sitting in a summer parlour, which he had for himself alone. And Ehud said, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat.

Judges 3:21 And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly:

Judges 3:22 And the haft also went in after the blade; and the fat closed upon the blade, so that he could not draw the dagger out of his belly; and the dirt came out.

Ehud made a two-edged dagger that was about 18" long. He fixed it under his clothes next to his right thigh and headed out to present Eglon with Israel's tribute. It is noted that Eglon was a "very fat man." After offering the king the required tribute, Ehud sent away those who had accompanied him. Clarke offers the following insight: "Presents, tribute, etc., in the eastern countries were offered with very great ceremony; and to make the more parade several persons, ordinarily slaves, sumptuously dressed, and in considerable number, were employed to carry what would not be a burden even to one."

Ehud evidently headed out like he was leaving as well, but he turned back after reaching the rock quarries by Gilgal. He went back to the king and told him that he had a secret errand to him. The king told him to say no more until he sent away all his attendants. Ehud came before the king in the summer parlor where they were alone and told him that he had a message from God for him. He got up from his seat pulling the dagger from his right thigh with his left hand and thrusting it deep into the king's belly. It went in so far that the handle was covered by fat as it closed over the blade; Ehud couldn't even pull it out.

The king must not have known what hit him since there wasn't even time for him to cry out for help.

"the dirt came out" = He defecated.

Judges 3:23 Then Ehud went forth through the porch, and shut the doors of the

parlour upon him, and locked them.

Judges 3:24 When he was gone out, his servants came; and when they saw that, behold, the doors of the parlour *were* locked, they said, Surely he covereth his feet in his summer chamber.

Judges 3:25 And they tarried till they were ashamed: and, behold, he opened not the doors of the parlour; therefore they took a key, and opened *them*: and, behold, their lord *was* fallen down dead on the earth.

Judges 3:26 And Ehud escaped while they tarried, and passed beyond the quarries, and escaped unto Seirath.

Ehud was able to leave through the porch and lock the doors behind him. When the king's servants came and saw that the doors were locked, they assumed that Eglon was relieving himself in private. After waiting what seemed an inordinately long time, they finally used a key to open the door and found the king dead on the floor. Meanwhile, Ehud had escaped and gotten past the quarries to find safety in Seirath (in the mountains of Ephraim).

Judges 3:27 And it came to pass, when he was come, that he blew a trumpet in the mountain of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mount, and he before them.

Judges 3:28 And he said unto them, Follow after me: for the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over.

Judges 3:29 And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty, and all men of valour; and there escaped not a man.

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

When he got to Seirath, Ehud blew a trumpet to signal the people to join him in battle against the Moabites. Before leading the troops out to fight, he told them that the LORD had given them the victory. The people followed Ehud and took up a position at the natural crossing places of the Jordan River and didn't allow even one man to cross the river. They killed about 10,000 of Moab's best warriors. The wording indicates that number included the whole Moabite army.

After defeating Moab, the Israelites had rest for eighty years—twice as long as the previous time of rest.

Judges 3:31 ¶ And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel.

We aren't told of Ehud's death until the next chapter.

Judges 4:1 "And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead."

The implication is that Ehud was alive for most of the eighty years of rest. It also seems that Shamgar, the next judge or deliverer identified, served during Ehud's

lifetime. Shamgar was raised up to deliver Israel from the Philistines, and he is credited with killing 600 Philistines with an ox goad. JFB describes an ox goad as follows: "This instrument is eight feet long and about six inches in circumference. It is armed at the lesser end with a sharp prong for driving the cattle, and on the other with a small iron paddle for removing the clay which encumbers the plough in working."

There is a verse in the next chapter that gives a bit more information about the time in which Shamgar served. It was a time when the public highways were not safe to travel, so people sought alternate paths to get from place to place.

Judges 5:6 "In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways."

Though there is only one tiny verse that mentions Shamgar, the LORD evidently wanted him recognized as a deliverer of Israel. This just makes me think about the many servants of God throughout history that have served Him so faithfully without any public recognition. The writer of the Hebrews makes reference to many great men and women of faith that could not be named.

Hebrews 11:32–38 "And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth."