

Immediate Context

Twelve judges are identified in the book of Judges and this lesson covers the first three, which amounts to around 150 years of Israel's history (8 years of oppression, 40 years of freedom, 18 years of oppression 80 years of freedom). This is a significant chunk of time. The United States as we know it is only 240 years old and we recognize major shifts in spiritual influences and direction over the years.

Judges 3:7-11 – Othniel: The Model Judge

- What was the evil committed by Israel? Not a lot of specifics are provided, but the heart result was that the Lord was forgotten (put out of mind) and their worship went to Baal and Asheroth (his consort), the god and goddess of the Canaanites. **To put this into perspective, consider whether it would be possible to “forget” your spouse and commit adultery, feeling no shame or regret. This is in essence what Israel did to God.**
- What was the result? God's anger was kindled (like stoking a fire) and He sold them to their enemies.
- Why “sold them”? They were God's possession (*Deuteronomy 14:2*), meant to be holy unto Him. They went from God's possession to another's: Cushan-rishathaim.
 - **If you think serving God is too hard, He'll let you try a different master.**
 - **Their natural reality began to match their spiritual reality.**
 - **Being sold into bondage wasn't salvation, but intended to loosen their grip on Baal.**
- Who is Cushan-rishathaim? This may be an insulting nickname, or a name designed to produce terror. It is literally, “Cushan of Double Wickedness of Aram (Syria) of the two rivers”. He is likely the most powerful adversary Israel faced in this book.
- Was Israel's cry to the Lord repentance? None of the commentators who performed word and contextual studies believe it is. Furthermore, what we see of the nation hereafter does not indicate repentance. The land had rest for 40 years afterward, but that did not mean that they were obedient because at the end of the 40 years, oppression began again. **God was moved by their despair, not by their repentance.**
- Who is Othniel? He was of the tribe of Judah, a younger brother or nephew of Caleb, and married to Caleb's daughter. He was disciplined by Caleb and had conquered Kiriath-sepher (*Judges 1:11-13*) under Caleb's direction.
- What qualified Othniel to judge Israel? He was picked by God and empowered by God.
- Was he a reasonable and logical choice? Yes, he was connected to the first generation, being disciplined by Caleb.
- How did Othniel succeed? We aren't told how he won; that wasn't important. Othniel was instrument, but God was the true Deliverer (*Proverbs 21:31*).
- Why 40 years? It is the rough span of a generation of adults. Israel's rest ended with Othniel's death. The rest was from war and oppression. **Consider the span of “rest” the Lord has now given us in America. What will we do with it?**
- In one sense, Othniel serves as the pinnacle of the judges/deliverers of Israel and it all goes downhill from here. We see every necessary ingredient of the Judges cycle in Othniel and we don't hear anything negative about him.

Judges 3:12-30 – Ehud: Deliverance from the Left Hand

- What evil did Israel commit? We aren't told, but it is likely of the same type as before. See verses 19 and 26 and note the idols at Gilgal. Gilgal was the place where they arrived when the Lord parted the Jordan so that Israel could enter into the Promised Land. It was near Jericho and was the site of the circumcision of the generation that entered the land. 12 stones were erected at this site in honor of what the Lord had done (*Joshua 4:20*). It was also the beginning of the journey the Angel of the Lord took when confronting Israel over their sin at Bochim (*Judges 2:1-5*). The fact that there are "idols" at Gilgal now show us how far they had fallen spiritually. **Ground that Israel had conquered for the Lord was seceded to the enemy.**
- Who is Eglon? His name means calf/bull (egol), which also sounds like round (agol). He was very overweight and didn't appear to be that bright. He was the King of Moab.
- Based on what we read, do you believe Eglon recognized the source of his success? No (see *Jeremiah 27:5-7* and *Daniel 4:28-30*).
- What is significant about Moab?
 - They are not listed among the nations "left" to test Israel (*Judges 3:3-6*).
 - They were relatives of Israel through Lot (*Genesis 19:36-37*) that were protected by God (*Deuteronomy 2:8-9*).
 - They were from without, not within the land of Israel. They had their own land adjacent to Israel.
 - They had tried to conquer Israel before with Balaam (*Numbers 22-24*) and failed.
 - Their success came from joint efforts with the Ammonites (also relatives through Lot) and the Amalekites (relatives through Esau).
- What is the City of the Palm Trees? It is Jericho (*Deuteronomy 34:3*). It is significant because of the curse of Joshua (*Joshua 6:26*). Eglon was either ignorant or egotistical.
- Who is Ehud? His name means, "where is the splendor"? He is a Benjaminite (meaning "son of the right hand") but was left-handed. Being left-handed was odd and notable, but was not uncommon among the Benjaminites (*Judges 20:16*). Based on the language, it is unclear whether he was left-handed because of injury, training, or natural aptitude.
- What qualified Ehud to be a judge/deliverer? The same qualification Othniel had. God raised him up. **Note the level of God's involvement in the details... even Ehud's left-handedness was ordained and used by God.**
- Did Ehud plan to assassinate Eglon or was an unexpected movement of God's Spirit? This was absolutely planned. The set-up (bringing a tribute) and return to lower Eglon's guard, the two-edged dagger (for stabbing) with no handle (for concealment and burying it in him), the binding to his right thigh and not surrendering it, and the clever escape (probably the result of scouting on his first visit). **There are times the Lord moves in unexpected ways and there were times that He moves through pre-meditated action. God can work in whatever way He wants.**
- What is the point of emphasizing Eglon's obesity and that his men were "robust" (meaning round)? It implies that Israel was working hard, but the Moabites were sitting and receiving the

tribute and getting fat off of their labors. Remember, they had been sold to another master and their master did not treat them well.

- What is the point of the detail in this narrative?
 - **Our God is not far-off or afraid to get involved in our mess (even when we cause it).**
 - This account was intended to be somewhat humorous for Israel, but also instructive. While Eglon was like a biblical version of Jabba the Hut, Israel was under his rule. **The Lord turned Israel's mourning into dancing, striking their oppressor in the fat gained from his oppression.**
- The victory the Lord gave Ehud lasted 80 years, approximately two generations.

Judges 3:31 – Shamgar: The third deliverer

- Who are the Philistines? The Philistines were originally from the island of Crete and settled on the southwestern shores of Israel's territory. This is the first time Israel faces conflict with them and it wouldn't be the last time.
- How did they oppress Israel? See *Judges 5:6-7*. Apparently, the Philistines were able to stop trade and travel along the major routes, perhaps exacting a toll or acting as thieves.
- When did this occur? See *Judges 4:1*. This seems to have been a regional event that occurred during the days of Ehud (the 80 years of rest).
- What is an oxgoad? It is a long, thick stick that is sharp at one end and possibly has a spade at the other end. It was used to clean a plow and prod an ox during farming.
- What do we know about Shamgar? We know that he is a "son of Anath", but that doesn't answer all of the questions. His name isn't typical for an Israelite and Anath was a Canaanite god (*Judges 1:33*). He could have been a converted Canaanite or an Israelite from a mixed marriage from the tribe of Naphtali (around Beth-Anath). There is a lot we do not know. What we do know is that the Lord raised him up and he delivered Israel and presumably judged them in some capacity.
- What is striking about this account?
 - It is so short. Very little detail is provided to us.
 - This is a miraculous story. Killing 600 men with an oxgoad is supernatural. It is reminiscent of what will happen with Samson.
 - This is a departure from the way the Lord worked with Othniel (traditional battle) and Ehud (deceit and surprise attack). **God will work the way He chooses to work and through the vessels He chooses to use, but He will always remain faithful to His people.**