

Judges

Lesson 7

With the end of the first cycle of corporate sin with the people of the Nation of Israel, about one hundred and fifty years had to have passed since departing Egypt with Moses. We calculate the number in this way. Moses led the people for forty years. Joshua then led the people for fifty years. Thus, ninety years had passed. Then, after the death of Joshua, the first cycle of sin began of the worship of Canaanite idols and graven images on the Canaanite high places that should have been torn down. Once the false worship was in full swing, the LORD allowed Cushan-rishathaim of Aram to control Israel for eight years. At the end of the eight years, the LORD raised Othniel to defeat Cushan and regain control of Israel and tamp down the Canaanite worship among the people in the Promised Land. Othniel controlled the nation as its prominent judge for forty years. Thus, ninety years for Moses and Joshua, eight years for Cushan, and forty years for Othniel equals one hundred and thirty-eight years. Our only question now is, "how long were the people of Israel worshiping the Canaanite gods before the LORD allowed Cushan to capture the nation?" We do not know. However, knowing that all the elders and leaders who served with Joshua and who had seen the mighty works of the LORD had to die before the people began the first cycle of sin, it is probably safe to say between ten and twelve years had to pass by. Therefore, it is also safe to say that about one hundred and fifty years were included in the first cycle of the sin of the Nation of Israel.

But when Othniel died at the end of forty years as the nation's magistrate, a new crop of leaders was coming into control. Think of it this way. In forty years under Othniel, babies were born and matured into solid leaders with opinions, ideas, and desires. With the death of old Othniel, they would allow the nation to drift away from the LORD just as the leaders after Joshua did at least fifty years before.

1. Cycle Two – The Moabite Takeover

a) Enter Eglon – Moab's King - Eighteen Years (3:12-14)

Thus, with the death of Othniel and the new leadership in place, Cycle two – the Moabite takeover began. The Nation of Israel is in full-blown evil with the worship of Canaanite gods, and the LORD is tired of it again. He allowed a foreign king to take over the Promised Land. Enter Eglon, Moab's king for eighteen years. Chapter 3, verse 12. *"Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD.¹³ And he gathered to himself the sons of Ammon and Amalek; and he went and defeated Israel, and they possessed the city of the palm trees.¹⁴ The sons of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years."* (3:12-14)

How long did the LORD allow the people of the Promised Land to sin against Him? We do not know. What we do know is this. The LORD allowed a cousin king of the Israelites to take them over. His name was Eglon, and he was the king of Moab. We must remember that Moab was the son of Lot, the nephew of Abraham. Therefore, Moab was a distant cousin of the Israelites. Moab's land was on the east side of the Dead Sea. When the Israelites came through the Moab territory under the leadership of Moses, Moab was not harmed because of the family relationship. But that was about a hundred years before, and much had happened in that hundred years.

Eglon did not capture the Promised Land by himself. He enlisted the help of the Ammonite people. Ammon was the second son of Lot. Therefore, the Ammonite people were close relatives of the Moabites. When Moses led Israel up the east side of the Jordan River and camped across from Jericho in Moab's land, and when he led in the defeat of the two Amorite kings and their lands

on the east side of the Jordan River, Moses did not harm the Ammonites or take their land because, like the Moabites, they, too, were distant cousins.

With the help of the Ammonites, Eglon also enlisted the help of the Amalekites. As much as we have spoken about the Amalekites in Israel's story, indeed, we remember who they are. But, just to be sure, let us take a moment to review. It was the Amalekites who followed the Israelites into the Mount Sinai area as they were arriving for the first time. There at Rephidim, they attacked Israel. Moses sent Joshua with an army to defeat them. As long as Moses held up his arms, Israel prevailed. When Moses dropped his arms, Amalek prevailed. Finally, the Amalekites retreated in fear and frustration. It was also the Amalekites whom Israel faced in battle shortly after the twelve spies returned to camp at Kadish-barnea. We can go on now; that is enough of a reminder. We will also see them in the future as they continue to be enemies of Israel. The Amalekites lived in the area of Hebron and up the country through the tribal area of Ephraim. Under the LORD's command, if the Amalekites were Canaanite, they should have been killed. If they were not Canaanite, they should have converted them to the worship of the LORD or made them leave the country, or killed them if they would not leave. We do not know the origin of the Amalekites, but they were not direct relatives of Israel.

Eglon, with the help of the Ammonites and Amalekites, defeated the armies of Israel and set his palace of power in the *city of the palm trees*. We have already discovered that this city was *Jericho*. Jericho had laid in ruins for almost a hundred years. The city had not been rebuilt; therefore, he had to have established a new village near the ruins of Jericho. From the new village near Jericho, Eglon ruled over Israel for eighteen years. Later, in this lesson, we will be given information that will almost assuredly identify the village of Eglon being established on the old campground of the Nation of Israel, for which they called the place *Gilgal*.

b) Enter Ehud - Israel's Judge - Eighty Years (3:15a)

At the end of the eighteen years under Eglon's control, the LORD finally raised a judge. Enter Ehud – Israel's judge for eighty years. Verse 15a. *“But when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for them, Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man.”* (3:15a)

In the first cycle of Israel's sin, it took only eight years for the people to cry out to the LORD for help. What happened in this second cycle? Why did it take them eighteen years? We are not told.

The critical point I want to make in this passage is the same point I made in the first cycle of sin. The LORD will not act while sin is in action until the sinner gets sick of his sin and calls upon the LORD for help. He is always ready to help, but He will wait patiently until His creation is ready to be helped. *“But when the sons of Israel cried to the LORD,”* the LORD stepped in to help. What did He do? He did the same thing that He did in the first cycle of sin. *“...the LORD raised up a deliverer for them”* In this case, the man's name was *“Ehud the son of Gera,”* of the tribe of Benjamin, *“a left-handed man.”* We do not want to miss the importance and background found in this part of the verse. First, Ehud was the son of Gera. Several hundred years later, during the life of King David, Shimei will also be identified as a Benjamite, the son of Gera. In 1st Chronicles 8:3, we learn that Jacob's son Benjamin had a son named Bela, who had a son named Gera. Gera was evidently a common name among the men of the tribe of Benjamin. This Gera was the father of Ehud.

Second, Ehud was of the tribe of Benjamin. In the first cycle of sin, the LORD raised a judge from the southern Promised Land to defeat the oppressor in the far northern portion of the Promised Land. In this second cycle of sin, the LORD chose a man closer to the oppressor. The destroyed city of Jericho, the city of palm trees, was in the tribal area of Benjamin. Therefore, the LORD selected a home tribal area judge to remedy the problem.

Third, Ehud was left-handed. This entry is the first time we have heard about a left-handed Benjaminite, but it will not be the last. When we arrive at Judges chapter 20, we will learn that there were seven hundred Benjaminite warriors who could sling a stone with their left hand. Later, in this lesson, we will understand why Ehud's left-handedness will be a great asset in defeating Eglon.

(1) Ehud Delivers Tribute to Eglon (3:15b)

As we move into the last part of verse 15, we see that Ehud delivers a tribute to Eglon. Verse 15b. *"And the sons of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab."* (3:15b)

No doubt, the nation of Israel had been sending a tribute to Eglon every year for eighteen years. It was the practice in that day that a defeated nation had to pay tribute to the winning nation's king. A tribute is nothing more than a tax. The tax could be money, but it could also be produce or livestock. More than likely, the tribute was due at harvest or the birthing season. More than likely, a money tribute was due at least once a year in addition to the produce and livestock tributes. In this case, the LORD had raised Ehud to be the judge, and it was time to send a tribute to Eglon. The tribute was placed under Ehud's care to be delivered.

(2) Ehud Plans to Kill Eglon (3:16)

(a) The Dagger Hidden

But before departing his home with the tribute, Ehud plans to kill Eglon. The Scripture speaks of the dagger hidden in verse 16. *"Ehud made himself a sword which had two edges, a cubit in length, and he bound it on his right thigh under his cloak."* (3:16)

We cannot imagine how long it took for Ehud to make this dagger. The text calls it a sword, but it was only a cubit long, about eighteen inches long, not long enough to be called a sword, but the perfect length for a dagger. Now, this dagger did not have to be made out of metal. It could have been carved out of wood. However, we do not know the composition of this dagger.

Nevertheless, for the purpose Ehud had for it, it had to have a sharp point, and, as the text says, it had two sharp edges like a double-edged knife. Once finished, he hid the dagger under his cloak on his right thigh. Being a left-handed man, the dagger could be drawn from the right thigh naturally. Right-handed men carried their daggers and swords on their left thighs. Most men were right-handed, and a sword or dagger on the left side of a man would seem natural. For a left-handed man with a hidden dagger on his right side, little worry would be present for a man to present a tribute to the king without security guards raising a concern. Ehud would look like he was unarmed.

(b) The Tribute Delivered (3:17a)

Prepared, we see the tribute delivered by Ehud. Verse 17a. *"He presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab."* (3:17)

(c) The King Described (3:17b)

Next, we see the king described. Verse 17b. *"Now Eglon was a very fat man."* (3:17b)

You can picture a fat man in your mind's eye as you wish. But in the case of Eglon, you need to think of an obese man with rolls upon rolls of fat, especially in the belly area. You will see why in a moment.

(i) The Assistants Dismissed (3:18)

With the king described, we come to the assistants dismissed. Verse 18. *"It came about when he had finished presenting the tribute, that he sent away the people who had carried the tribute."* (3:18)

If Ehud carried any of the tribute to Eglon in his own hands, it was not all of the tribute. Ehud had helpers helping to carry the tremendous tribute to Eglon in the palace setting near the old city of Jericho. Once the tribute was presented, Ehud sent his men away.

(ii) The Secret Announced (3:19a)

Next, the writer tells us of the secret announced. Verse 19. “*But he himself turned back from the idols which were at Gilgal, and said, I have a secret message for you, O king.’ And he said, Keep silence.”*” (3:19a)

We do not want to read anything into this verse that is not there, but it seems that this verse is telling us the location of the village of Eglon, located on the old campgrounds of the Nation of Israel for which the Israelites called the place *Gilgal*. It was Israel’s first campground after crossing the Jordan River, right next to the walls of Jericho, on the east side of the city. There, Ehud dismissed his helpers when he saw the Canaanite “*idols*” there in Eglon’s village at Gilgal. You might want to think of it this way. More than likely, Ehud and his men left the immediate presence of Eglon after the tribute was delivered. A short distance from the king, more than likely still in his eyesight, Ehud dismissed his men near a standing Canaanite idol. Let us not forget, the Moabites worshiped the Canaanite idols even in the days of Moses. Then, once the men were dismissed, Ehud turned around and said to Eglon, “*I have a secret message for you, O king.’ And he said, Keep silence.”*” Eglon must have loved secrets. And because Ehud has just delivered the grand tribute, and because Ehud did not have a weapon showing on his left thigh, as would be normal, Eglon was ready and willing to hear a “*secret*.”

(iii) The King Secluded (3:19b-20a)

Then, we see the king secluded. Verse 19b. “*And all who attended him left him. ²⁰ Ehud came to him while he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber.”*” (3:19b-20a)

For whatever reason, Eglon’s guards leave the king alone with Ehud. The king is by himself in a cool room on the roof. More than likely, it had shutter-like window doors that could be opened so the king could feel the breezes that commonly run down the Jordan River valley. But, these cool rooms were also used as bathrooms. As a reminder, Gilgal, where Eglon is stationed, is in the Arabah valley where the river runs.

(iv) The Dagger Delivered (3:20b-22)

Alone, Ehud with Eglon, we see the dagger delivered. Verse 20b. “*And Ehud said, I have a message from God for you.’ And he arose from his seat. ²¹ Ehud stretched out his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh and thrust it into his belly. ²² The handle also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the sword out of his belly; and the refuse came out.”*” (3:20b-22)

We do not know why Eglon trusted Ehud enough to allow him to come so close, but he did. What did Ehud say to Eglon? He said, “*I have a message from God for you.”*” Did Ehud have a true message from God for Eglon? Absolutely! The LORD God wanted Eglon dead.

When Eglon heard Ehud’s words, notice that Eglon stood to his feet. Without knowing, Eglon put himself in greater danger than he would have been if he had remained seated. Standing, Ehud had a stretch-out chest area to drive the dagger into the belly. If Eglon had remained seated, it would have been almost impossible to drive a dagger into the belly for an immediate deadly wound. Ehud buried the dagger, and the fat of Eglon engulfed the dagger. He was dead. All his muscles relaxed. And the Scripture confirmed this because his bowels emptied as is normal at death.

(v) The Planned Escape (3:23)

From the dagger delivered, it was time for the planned escape. Verse 23. “*Then Ehud went out into the vestibule and shut the doors of the roof chamber behind him, and locked them.”*” (3:23)

After killing Eglon, Ehud simply walked out through the vestibule and shut and locked the doors behind him as he left Eglon alone, dead.

(vi) The Servants' Concerned

(a) The Servants' Thoughts (3:24)

After a while, the servants became concerned, and the writer presents the servants' thoughts. Verse 24. *"When he had gone out, his servants came and looked, and behold, the doors of the roof chamber were locked; and they said, 'He is only relieving himself in the cool room.'"* (3:24)

Eglon's servants dismissed the locked doors while thinking that Eglon was simply using the bathroom in the cool room. What did the servants do?

(b) The Servants' Pause (3:25a)

The servants' pause before going through the locked doors. Verse 25a. *"They waited until they became anxious; but behold, he did not open the doors of the roof chamber."* (3:25a)

(c) The Servants' Discovery (3:25b)

But after a while, the servants became worried, and we now come to the servant's discovery. Verse 25b. *"Therefore they took the key and opened them, and behold, their master had fallen to the floor dead."* (3:25b)

(3) Ehud Calls for Battle (3:26)

Just because Eglon is dead, it does not mean the Moabite rule of Israel is over. In the eighteen years that Eglon was in the Promised Land, the Moabites entrenched themselves into the land and would not leave easily. They were living in permanent structures, not tents. It would take a battle. But first, Ehud had to escape to a safe place. Verse 26. *"Now Ehud escaped while they were delaying, and he passed by the idols and escaped to Seirah."* (3:26)

Evidently, during this second cycle of sin, the Israelites had allowed the building of idols throughout the land. Ehud passed by these idols on his way to Seirah. Seirah means *woody*. It is a reference to a *woody* location on Mount Ephraim at the border of Benjamin and Judah. It was only a short distance from Jericho/Gilgal.

(a) The Home of the Warriors (3:27)

At Seirah, Ehud blew the trumpet in the home of the warriors of Israel. Verse 27. *"It came about when he had arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel went down with him from the hill country, and he was in front of them."* (3:27)

Ehud was not disappointed. The army of Israel came to fight with him. Ehud led the army back to Jericho/Gilgal and the camp of the dead king.

(b) The Instruction to the Warriors (3:28a)

Ehud instructed the warriors. Verse 28a. *"He said to them, 'Pursue them, for the LORD has given your enemies the Moabites into your hands.'"* (3:28a)

This must have been a fast turnaround for Ehud and his warriors. The reason comes next.

(c) The Success of the Warriors (3:28a-30)

We now see the success of the warriors of Israel in verse 28a. *"So they went down after him and seized the fords of the Jordan opposite Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross."* ²⁹ *"They struck down at that time about ten thousand Moabites, all robust and valiant men; and no one escaped."* ³⁰ *"So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel."* (3:28a-30a)

Once it was discovered that Eglon was dead, the men of Moab and their families were gathering their things with the intention of heading back across the Jordan River to their home tribal area of Moab. The Israelite warriors did not let that happen. Ehud and his warriors killed more than ten thousand mighty Moabite warriors and ousted the Moabites from the Promised Land that day.

(4) Ehud Rules as Judge (3:30b)

With the ousting of Moab, Ehud rules as judge over Israel for eighty years. Verse 30b. *"And the land was undisturbed for eighty years."* (3:30b)

Eighty years. Can you believe that? Surely Ehud was at least twenty when he led the charge against Eglon and the Moabites. If he ruled eighty years, that means that he must have been over one hundred years of age at his death. Nevertheless, Israel served the LORD under Ehud's lead for eighty years. But, it is not clear if Israel began to fall into its third cycle of sin immediately after the death of Ehud. Why? Because the writer inserts another judge next in the text.

c) Enter Shamgar - Israel's Judge - Unknown Years (3:31)

Enter Shamgar – Israel's judge for an unknown number of years. Verse 31. *"After him came Shamgar the son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad; and he also saved Israel."* (3:31)

There was never just one judge over the Israelites. Judges were in every major city in every tribal area. It is quite possible that Shamgar was a minor judge in the tribal area of Dan, Judah, or Simeon and served in that position during the rule of the major judge, Ehud. In addition, we cannot doubt that Shamgar killed six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad. No doubt he did. An oxgoad was a long metal or wooden rod that a herder used to poke an ox to entice it to move along in plowing a field. It was also used to keep cattle moving down a path or road.

Two issues arise with this verse. First, in the time between and before Ehud and Deborah, the Philistines are not enemies of Israel. They do not appear to be enemies until the time of Saul in 1st Samuel. We will see them in the story of Samson, but not as enemies of Israel. Second, Shamgar, whose name means *"the name of a stranger,"* saved Israel by killing these Philistines, for which we have no Biblical knowledge why. Be that as it may, the historian, Flavius Josephus, tells us that this Shamgar died in his first year as a judge. (Antiquities V. 4, 3) But how long after Ehud's death did it take for Shamgar to become a judge? We do not know. We will find out in Judges 5:6 that Shamgar and Jael were alive at the same time in Israel. Because Shamgar was alive at the time of Ehud, that means Jael was also alive at the time of Ehud. Jael is a married Kenzite woman. But we will investigate that when we arrive in chapter five in the third cycle of sin.

The summary of the lesson is this, the second cycle of Israel's sin and oppression lasted eighteen years before the people became so sick of it that they called for help from the LORD, and He did not disappoint. The risen judge kept the Nation of Israel in line with the LORD's covenant and commandments for eighty years. Thus, the end of the second cycle is complete and so is this lesson.