

## “God’s Power; Man’s Weakness” (Judges 3:7–31)

Have you ever wondered, “How could God use someone like me?” Perhaps you are consumed with guilt over sin and failure. You may suffer with the scars of your family history or personal background. Perhaps you have physical problems and limitations. Maybe you have difficulty accepting yourself and bear the burden of a poor self-image.<sup>1</sup> Maybe you feel inadequate due to a lack of education, skills, or spiritual gifts. I don’t know about you but when I think of myself I’m not impressed. There are many physical features I dislike about myself. There are many personality quirks, I wish I could change. When I think of myself from the world’s perspective, underwhelmed comes to mind. Yet, over the course of my life, the Lord has taught me that He loves to use weak and foolish people like me.<sup>2</sup>

We are in the second sermon in a series through the Book of Judges (“Avoid Generation Degeneration”). The introduction to Judges (1:1–3:6) revealed what devastating consequences occur when God’s people rebel against Him. Now the author is going to focus on three judges whom God uses in a powerful way. In Judges 3:7–31 we will see, “*Our responsibility is response to God’s ability.*”<sup>3</sup> In these twenty-five verses, the term “Lord” (*Yahweh*) occurs thirteen times. That’s every other verse! Even though God dominates this passage, these three stories remind us that He uses people like you and me to accomplish His purposes in the world.

Our first story in 3:7–11 begins on an ominous note. “**The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot [abandoned]<sup>4</sup> the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth [female Canaanite deities...Baal’s girlfriends]**” (3:7). The opening phrase “the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD” is repeated throughout Judges (3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). Each time the phrase is used, it marks a period of oppression by Israel’s enemies. In spite of the amazing grace that God showed His people in Judges 1–2, Israel walked away from God. These people weren’t just having a bad spiritual day. They didn’t skip their devotions or forget to pray, they actively rebelled against the one true God whom they were in covenant with!

In 3:8, God gets ticked!<sup>5</sup> “**Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim [“Doubly-Wicked”] king of Mesopotamia; and the sons of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years.**” The phrase “the anger of the Lord was kindled” literally reads “the Lord’s nose became hot.” This is a figurative way of describing God’s wrath.<sup>6</sup> We tend to get angry to benefit ourselves; God gets angry because His holiness elicits a response.<sup>7</sup> In His anger, the Lord sells His people to the enemy.<sup>8</sup> Israel acts like slaves, so God sells them like slaves.<sup>9</sup> God will not allow His people to sin successfully. God will use whatever form of discipline is necessary to restore His children to fellowship.

Although God is angry, 3:9–11 demonstrates His grace. “**When the sons of Israel cried to the LORD,<sup>10</sup> the LORD raised up a deliverer [a savior]<sup>11</sup> for the sons of Israel to deliver them, Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, the LORD gave Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand,<sup>12</sup> so that he prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim. Then the land had rest [no war]<sup>13</sup> forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died.**” Despite Israel’s rebellion, God listens to their cries and delivers them. What’s interesting is the word translated “cried” (*za’aq*) does not refer to repentance. Rather, the word denotes crying for help out of distress.<sup>14</sup> This is an important conclusion, for it shows that when the Lord raises up a judge for Israel He is not reacting to any repentance on Israel’s part. If anything, He is responding to their misery rather than to their sorrow, to their pain rather than their penitence. Who then can ever plumb the depths of the Lord’s compassion for His people, even His sinful people who are more moved by their distress than by their depravity? Truly, God delivers out of sheer grace.<sup>15</sup> Today, will you express your great love and appreciation to God for His tremendous mercy and grace?

In our story, the judge God raises up is Othniel—the man who captured Kiriath Sepher and married Caleb’s daughter, Achsah (1:12–13).<sup>16</sup> Othniel, the first judge, is exemplary in every way. Samson, the twelfth and final judge, is deplorable in almost every possible way. The progression downward, even in Israel’s leaders, is clear.<sup>17</sup> Yet, God uses each of His judges in unique and powerful ways. Please note in 3:10 that God’s Spirit empowers Othniel.<sup>18</sup> This is true of all the judges, though the writer does not always mention it. No one can accomplish anything significant spiritually without the Holy Spirit’s enablement (cf. John 15:5). However, with God’s assistance His people can be the agents of supernatural change and can carry out His will. Never underestimate the good that one person can do who is filled with the Spirit of God and obedient to the will of God. It is so easy to accomplish ministry in the flesh—through our own abilities, knowledge, or personality. You can pull this off and even fool a lot of people. But if you want your work for the Lord to stand the test of time (1 Cor 3:10–15), you need to rely upon Him. *Our responsibility is response to God’s ability.* God wants you and me to know that we can’t do anything apart from Him.

After reading this first story, you should be struck by the colorless nature of Othniel. There is no flash and dash about Othniel. In fact, this entire story just reveals the bare essentials, which consist of what the Lord has done.<sup>19</sup> It is likely that this first story about a judge is stripped down so that we will see clearly what is most essential—the activity of the Lord. God’s victories are, to a greater degree, stories about God than stories about human heroes. In other words, God wants us to learn about Himself more than about Othniel.<sup>20</sup> Sometimes interesting people can obscure that, and we end up watching these fascinating folks but never see what our God is doing.<sup>21</sup> Othniel is a man of anonymity. People didn’t know much about him.<sup>22</sup> But what is clear is that Othniel was a Kenizzite—a foreigner. This serves as an example that background should not limit your service to Christ.<sup>23</sup> Regardless of your family of origin, ethnicity, or nationality, God wants to use you powerfully. *Your responsibility is response to God’s ability.*

Our second story is found in 3:12–30, and it begins just like the first account. **“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. And he gathered to himself the sons of Ammon and Amalek;<sup>24</sup> and he went and defeated Israel, and they possessed the city of the palm trees. The sons of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years”** (3:12–14). This story begins, once again, with God firmly on the side of the pagans (3:12). Obviously, God is very unhappy with His people, so He decides to use idolaters (the Moabites) to discipline idolaters (the Israelites). Eglon & Co. possess the “city of the palm trees” (3:13). Now your mind may immediately think of Hawaii or some other tropical paradise. But the “city of the palm trees” was Jericho (Deut 34:3), which was the first town that Israel captured in Joshua 6. This is a telling picture of how far Israel has fallen. She did not continue to possess the land; instead, her enemies took the land back by force. Additionally, Israel suffers under Eglon for eighteen years. Under Cushan the Doubly Wicked, she only suffered for eight years. When God’s people fail to learn from His discipline, He may turn the heat up. The goal, then, must be to respond to God’s chastening and learn whatever lessons we can so that we don’t have to retake the test.

In 3:15, we come across a very important verse. **“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. And the sons of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab.”** The Lord raises up Ehud to take on King Eglon and deliver Israel. The narrator states that Ehud is left-handed. This may seem like a small detail, but it is a key point. The whole story is built around Ehud being left-handed, which to the writer is a limitation. In Hebrew, being left-handed is described as “restricted in his right hand.” This can be understood in one of three ways: (1) Ehud was disabled.<sup>25</sup> (2) Ehud was ambidextrous.<sup>26</sup> (3) Ehud was left-handed, nothing more, nothing less. Although all of these views have merit and may shed some light on this account, the best interpretation seems to be the third option. Ehud is a left-handed man from the tribe of Benjamin, a name that means “son of my right hand.” Perhaps you’re still not convinced of the significance of this narrative insertion. Let me explain.

Historically, left-handedness has been seen as an oddity, almost a disability. People were encouraged to correct their left-handed children. Being left-handed was even seen by some as being a sign of evil! Language seems to bear out this meaning. A man who is awkward is called *gauche*, a French word meaning left-handed. Something that is wicked or evil we call *sinister*, the Latin word for the left-hand. I am married to a lefty so I have to be careful about what I say here. I recently asked my wife about the challenges of being a lefty and she rattled off several. When we go out to dinner, we often forget that if she sits at my right hand (the seat of power and authority) we have a hard time eating because our elbows are constantly colliding with one another. Lori can't use scissors with her left hand because most scissors are manufactured for right-handed people. So Lori cuts with her right hand. Lori likes to journal, but she has a difficult time writing on the top pages. She typically smears the ink as she writes. She even tells me that people make fun of her and say that she writes upside down because of the way she positions her left hand as she writes. Being left-handed certainly has its disadvantages. You might say that left-handed people were discriminated against. At the very least, being left-handed was considered unnatural and peculiar in antiquity.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps the left-handers of the world should form a "lefty lib."

Ehud could have been devastated by this problem. "Why am I left-handed in a world of right-handers? Why am I different?" Many of us are defeated by things in our lives which may be no more significant than left-handedness. But if we do not accept our limitations, they can keep us from being usable. When we accept ourselves with our weaknesses and limitations, God can use us. That is exactly what Ehud did.<sup>28</sup> Ehud uses his own physical limitations to carry out the work of God. In Ehud, the author is able to show that God's leaders are those who use the talents and circumstances that God has given them to do His work, even when that entails some limitations.<sup>29</sup>

In 3:16, we discover that Ehud is like an ancient James Bond. "**Ehud made himself a sword which had two edges, a cubit [18", the distance between the elbow and the tip of the middle finger]<sup>30</sup> in length, and he bound it on his right thigh under his cloak.**" This is the start of the ancient James Bond movie. Ehud makes himself a sword and binds it to his right thigh under his cloak. King Eglon's security apparently assumed that Ehud was a right-handed man. They must have frisked him before allowing him to enter into Eglon's chamber. If they did not frisk him, this suggests that Ehud was extremely unimpressive and unthreatening because the bodyguards and security allowed him entrance with seemingly no hesitation.

In 3:17a, Ehud enters the king's chambers and presents a tribute (a form of taxation, probably largely agricultural produce<sup>31</sup>) to Eglon. The paying of tribute added to the king's wealth and acknowledged the king's authority over Israel. This verse concludes with some very unusual words: "**Now Eglon was a very fat man**" (3:17b). Why does the narrator include this statement? It appears rather cruel. At the very least it is not politically or socially correct. It is important to understand that when the Bible refers to a person as "fat," it points to an individual who is a lazy, selfish, hoarder. In this case, Eglon is indulging in the tributes. While it is real he is most likely hungry, Eglon is devouring everything in sight. Ironically, Eglon's name means "fat ox." Here he is portrayed as a fattened calf going to the slaughter.<sup>32</sup>

In 3:18–20, our story picks up speed. "**It came about when he had finished presenting the tribute, that he sent away the people who had carried the tribute. 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.' And all who attended him left him. Ehud came to him while he was sitting alone in his cool roof chamber. [The man was chilling out without a care in the world.] And Ehud said, 'I have a message from God for you.' And he arose from his seat.**" The Hebrew word translated "message" (*dbr*) means "word" or "thing." This serves as a double entendre for the verbal message and for Ehud's dagger.<sup>33</sup> Ehud is not being deceptive when he declares that he has a "message" for Eglon. God's messages are not always positive messages of well-being or of hope; they are, at times, messages of judgment and death.

In 3:21–23, our story moves into slow motion. **“Ehud stretched out his left hand, took the sword from his right thigh and thrust it into his belly. 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.”<sup>34</sup> Then Ehud went out into the vestibule and shut the doors of the roof chamber behind him, and locked *them*.”**

This episode would have been on Israel’s newscast of sports highlights at 11:00. When Eglon stands, Ehud reaches for his dagger and plunges it into the fat king’s body. It must have been a powerful thrust because the point of the dagger came out the king’s back; and Eglon died instantly.

We now come to an amusing verse that is filled with bathroom humor. (Sorry ladies, but I have to be as biblical as possible.) In 3:24, the author of Judges writes, **“When he [Ehud] 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.’”** If you have a center or single-column reference Bible, you will see that the Hebrew phrase “relieving himself” literally means “covering his feet.” This is a wonderful word picture. This afternoon if you want to be really biblical you can tell your spouse or children that you need to go “cover your feet.” Apparently, Eglon’s men thought that their king left his throne to go sit down on his other throne. I’m sure even in Eglon’s day men took magazines and books into the throne room. No doubt these ancient men took twenty, thirty, or even sixty minutes like many contemporary men do today. This is what makes 3:25a so amusing: **“They waited until they became anxious; but behold, he did not open the doors of the roof chamber.”** This must be one of the greatest understatements of the Bible. As indicated above, these men must have waited quite a while. But the length of time and the stench of Eglon’s bowels made them anxious, literally “ashamed.” Can’t you just envision this episode? You know how men are. These guys were no doubt coarse in their jesting. They must have been laughing their heads off, then crying over the stench at the same time. In 3:25b, the men said enough is enough: **“Therefore they took the key and opened them, and behold, their master had fallen to the floor dead.”<sup>35</sup>** The three “behold” statements in 3:24–25 indicate the three surprises that the men experience: the doors are locked, the king doesn’t respond to their knocks and calls, and the king is dead. All of this took time and gives Ehud opportunity to escape, much like James Bond.

Our story concludes in 3:26–30. **“Now Ehud escaped while they were delaying, and he passed by the idols and escaped to Seirah. 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. He said to them, ‘Pursue *them*, for the LORD has given<sup>36</sup> your enemies the Moabites into your hands.’ So they went down after him and seized the fords of the Jordan opposite Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross. They struck down at that time about ten thousand<sup>37</sup> Moabites, all robust and valiant men; and no one escaped.<sup>38</sup> So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land was undisturbed for eighty years.”<sup>39</sup>** Ehud leads his people to annihilate 10,000 of God’s enemies. Consequently, God grants Israel peace for eighty years! Some scholars assume that Ehud is guilty of treachery and murder. However, the question is: Did God call His people to exterminate the Canaanites? If so, it is a holy war, and all is fair in love and war.<sup>40</sup> The author of Judges portrays Ehud as a hero. Indeed, Ehud the courageous lefty does lefties proud! The name “Ehud” may be derived from the Hebrew word “one,” playing off the fact that our champion stands alone. Alternatively, the name may be derived from a word meaning “majesty,” in which case it serves to applaud him.<sup>41</sup> When no one else in Israel was willing to fight God’s enemies, Ehud stepped up in a big way.

What gave Ehud this type of boldness and courage? The clue is found in 3:19 and 26. Ehud may have been worshiping idols like the rest of Israel, but one day he said, “I’m turning my back on idolatry and I’m going to destroy God’s enemies. If the Jews had been asked to vote on a leader, Ehud probably would have lost on the first ballot. But he was God’s choice, and God used him to set the nation free. Moses was slow of speech and Paul was not imposing in his appearance, but Moses and Paul, like Ehud, were men of faith who led others to victory. Ehud turned a disability into a possibility because he depended on the Lord.

Our third and final story is a “one-verse wonder”—a mere sound bite.<sup>42</sup> Check out this amazing and unorthodox story in 3:31: “**After him [Ehud] came Shamgar<sup>43</sup> the son of Anath, who struck down six hundred<sup>44</sup> Philistines with an oxgoad;<sup>45</sup> and he also saved Israel.**” I love this name Shamgar. You can tell that this man is one bad dude! Just say that name a few times out loud: Shamgar...Shamgar! That’s a stud! And notice as well he’s “the son of Anath!” This is obviously a manly man! Interestingly, Shamgar is not an Israelite name. Furthermore, “Anath” is the name of a Canaanite goddess of war. Perhaps “son of Anath” was a nickname that meant “son of battle”—that is, a mighty warrior. So here we have a non-Israelite delivering Israel. The point: God can use anyone to deliver His people.<sup>46</sup>

Shamgar seems to be a professional soldier who is a bit impulsive. In this episode, Shamgar’s weapon of choice is an “oxgoad,” which is a stick about eight feet long with a sharpened iron point (1 Sam 3:21), used to train and drive oxen when plowing (cf. Eccl 12:11). He uses the oxgoad like a javelin or spear. Shamgar is a man with inadequate weapons. Nevertheless, he is a man who obeys God and defeats the enemy even though his resources are limited. Instead of complaining about not possessing a sword or spear, Shamgar gives what he has to the Lord, and the Lord uses it. God makes His power obvious in human weakness.<sup>47</sup> So give your education, experience, and talents to Him. Give whatever tools you have to the Lord, stand your ground courageously, and trust God to use what’s in your hand to accomplish great things for His glory.”

A woman walked to work past a pet store. One day a parrot called out to her as she passed and said, “Hey lady, you’re ugly.” She was upset but blew it off. Same thing happened the next day. She got a little angrier but went on. The third day the same thing happened. She went into the store and told the owner who had a talk with the parrot. The next day she passes by, “Hey lady.” She looks at him and says, “Yes?” The parrot said, “You know.”

In this life, there will be people who call you ugly. Others will say you don’t have what it takes. You will feel inadequate, incapable, and inferior. But if you bring all that you are to the Lord, He can do great things in and through you. Stop letting the enemy, your flesh, and others keep you from achieving all that God has for you. Yield yourself to the Lord and let Him fill you. *Your responsibility is response to God’s ability.*

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### **Scripture References**

Judges 3:7–31

Ephesians 6:10–19

1 John 2:15–17

Acts 4:24, 28

2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1; 11:3

1 Peter 5:8

Deuteronomy 7:7–11

### **Study Questions**

1. Why am I often prone to do “evil in the sight of the LORD,” when He is so gracious and patient (3:7)? Can I accurately articulate the biblical balance between God’s patience and His anger (3:8)? How does God express His anger in my life today? Read Psalm 18:25–26 and Galatians 6:7–8. Have I recently experienced God’s discipline in my life? How did I respond? What did I learn?
2. Why is it so important to be filled with the Holy Spirit (3:10)? Read John 15:5. When have I recently been filled with the Spirit for the purpose of accomplishing ministry? How can I have confidence that I am truly filled with God’s Spirit? Read Ephesians 5:18–21.
3. How has God used my disabilities and weaknesses in ministry (3:15)? What has He taught me through these experiences? Who has challenged and inspired me in the use of their gifts despite their limitations? How did the great apostle Paul deal with his “thorn in the flesh”? Read 2 Corinthians 12:1–10.
4. Do the following characteristics describe me: power, strategy, and courage? Why or why not? Read 2 Timothy 1:7. How can I become a man or woman of valor? What “flesh and blood” example can I imitate in my pursuit to be more like Christ? Read 1 Corinthians 4:16.
5. What faulty perspectives keep me from achieving God’s work in and through me? Read Colossians 3:1–3. How can I ensure that I am fruitful for Him? What step of obedience will I take this week as a result of studying Judges 3?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Inrig, *Heart of Iron, Feet of Clay* (Chicago: Moody, 1979), 44.

<sup>2</sup> Paul writes, “But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God” (1 Cor 1:27–29). Zechariah 4:6 states: “‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts.”

<sup>3</sup> Verlyn D. Verbrugge, *Your Church Sign* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 81.

<sup>4</sup> This is the only occurrence in Judges of the verb *shakach*, translated “forget.” Block argues persuasively that this verb denotes “to disregard, not to take into account” (cf. Judges 2:11–13). Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*. The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 151.

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 90:11: “Who understands the power of Your anger and Your fury, according to the fear that is due You?”

<sup>6</sup> This is called an anthropomorphism—a figure of speech where human traits or emotions are ascribed to God.

<sup>7</sup> Anger that is acceptable to God is the anger that is appropriately directed against sin or inequity (cf. Josh 23:16; Ps 106:32–40; Amos 5:11–15; Ezek 22:23–31). Anger that displeases God is the expression of rage either that seeks the benefit of oneself rather than that of another or that extends beyond an appropriate time (both types of anger being those which ultimately work against the individual who expresses that emotion, cf. Eph 4:26; Jas 1:19–20).

<sup>8</sup> Four times in the Book of Judges we’re told that God “sold” His people to the enemy (3:8; 2:14; 4:2; 10:7).

<sup>9</sup> If Israel had been faithful to the Lord, He would have sold their enemies into their hands (Deut 32:30).

<sup>10</sup> 1 Samuel 7:3 provides an example of how to cry out to the Lord: “Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, ‘If you return to the LORD with all your heart, remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your hearts to the LORD and serve Him alone; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.’”

<sup>11</sup> The leaders in Judges are not called “servants of the Lord,” like Moses and Joshua. They are “deliverers.”

<sup>12</sup> Why does the Lord give Cushan-rishathaim into Israel’s hands? Davis explains, “When Yahweh’s own people are unfaithful, he raises up an instrument of his wrath to bring them low; but then the time comes when that instrument becomes too big for his international britches, when the instrument deludes himself into thinking *he* is Lord rather than the feeble vassal of the Great King. Then Yahweh must bring down his instrument-that-refuses-to-be-an-instrument.” Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges: Such a Great Salvation*. Focus on the Bible (Ross-Shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2000), 52.

<sup>13</sup> Eaton notes, “The outcome of victorious work for God was ‘rest’ (3:11). This is what ‘entering into rest’ is - it is the reward of one’s labours after one has inherited the promises of God by diligent works of faith. “Rest’ is the enjoyment of the blessings of God, the reward of diligent faith.’ Michael Eaton, *Judges and Ruth*. Preaching through the Bible (England: Sovereign World, 2000), 22.

<sup>14</sup> See Davis, *Judges*, 49–51. See also Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 153. Younger adds, “That the element of repentance is lacking can be graphically seen in 10:14, where when the Israelites cry out [z’q] to Yahweh, he retorts sarcastically, ‘Go and cry out (z’q) to the gods you have chosen. Let them save [hosia’] you when you are in trouble [sara].” See K. Lawson Younger Jr., *Judges, Ruth*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 102.

<sup>15</sup> Davis, *Judges*, 50.

<sup>16</sup> Bible scholars don’t agree as to the exact blood relationship Othniel had to Caleb. Was Othniel Caleb’s nephew—that is, the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother—or was he simply Caleb’s younger brother? As far as the text is concerned, either interpretation is possible.

<sup>17</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 149–50.

<sup>18</sup> In ancient Israel, the Spirit of the Lord came upon (cf. Jdg 6:34; 11:29; 14:6, 19; 15:4; 1 Sam 10:10; 11:6; 19:20, 23; 1 Chron 12:18; 2 Chron 20:14) or filled (cf. Exod 31:3; 35:31; Deut 34:9; Micah 3:8) specific individuals to perform specific tasks (e.g., designing the Temple, prophesying, leading people to victory in battle). Yet, Block argues condignly that the filling of the Spirit was not selective and impermanent in the OT. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 154–55.

<sup>19</sup> Wright astutely notes, “The story of Othniel differs from the other judges in its universal scope. Unlike the other judges, Othniel, did not face one of Israel’s immediate neighbors but rather the “king of Mesopotamia,” a generic title pointing to the mighty empires of the east which would so trouble Israel during the latter days of the monarchy. Furthermore, while the activity of the other judges was limited to one or at most several of the tribes, Othniel appears to have delivered all Israel. The paradigm of an effective judge was thus set: total deliverance from the most powerful of enemies. No other judgment this standard.” Paul Wright ed., *Joshua, Judges*. Shepherd’s Notes (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 65.

<sup>20</sup> Eaton, *Judges and Ruth*, 22.

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<sup>21</sup> Davis, *Judges*, 55. Sailhamer writes, “It is clear that the author is primarily interested in the pattern and the lesson about God’s grace and forgiveness that it teaches. He gives little else for the reader to think on. His purpose is to establish this pattern as straightforwardly as possible at the beginning. In the subsequent stories, the author will include many more historical details in each of the stories. By leaving out such details here at the beginning and concentrating only on the pattern of God’s dealings, the author assures us that this pattern will not be lost to the reader amid increasing details of each story.” John Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 207.

<sup>22</sup> Jewish rabbis were so impressed with Othniel that they ranked him first among the judges and applied to him the words of the Song of Solomon 4:7: “You are altogether fair, my love; there is no flaw in you.” Inrig, *Heart of Iron, Feet of Clay*, 48.

<sup>23</sup> Younger, *Judges, Ruth*, 109.

<sup>24</sup> The armies of Mesopotamia came a long distance to invade Israel; but the Moabites, Ammonites, and Amalekites were not only neighbors but also *relatives* of the Jews. Lot, the nephew of Abraham, was the ancestor of Moab and Ammon (Gen 19:30–38); and Esau, the brother of Jacob, was the ancestor of Amalek (Gen 36:12, 16; Deut 25:17, 19).

<sup>25</sup> See Eaton, *Judges and Ruth*, 23. This view is attractive because it preaches well and explains why the security allowed Ehud to enter without hesitation. The problem, however, is that in Judges 20:16, there are seven hundred troops with their right hand restricted who could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.

<sup>26</sup> The Benjamites were known for their ambidexterity (Judges 20:16 and 1 Chron 12:2). Furthermore, the LXX (Greek OT) translates the Hebrew phrase in question by a word meaning ambidextrous (*amphoterodexios*). Yet, the Hebrew phrase seems like an odd way of describing an ambidextrous person.

<sup>27</sup> Younger, *Judges, Ruth*, 114.

<sup>28</sup> Inrig, *Heart of Iron, Feet of Clay*, 51.

<sup>29</sup> Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary*, 207.

<sup>30</sup> Although the Hebrew word *gomed* (“cubit”) only occurs here in the OT, Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 163, argues that it was understood as a cubit. See also Victor H. Matthews, *Judges and Ruth*. New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 60. Others maintain that *gomed* refers to a short cubit (approx. 12”). See Thomas Constable, *Judges* 2009: 25 n. 95.

<sup>31</sup> Davis, *Judges*, 60; Younger 116.

<sup>32</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 158.

<sup>33</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 598.

<sup>34</sup> The LXX (Greek OT) translation leaves this last phrase entirely!

<sup>35</sup> Why did God destroy Eglon, whom He originally commissioned to bring judgment against His own people (3:12–13, 20–21)? First, Eglon did not acknowledge God’s role in empowering him to defeat and rule over the people of Israel, as was evidenced by the presence of idols in his palace; hence, Eglon still worshiped idols, rather than the living God (3:26). Second, Eglon apparently ruled harshly, rather than compassionately, as the cry of God’s people for deliverance suggests (3:15).

<sup>36</sup> The author of Judges uses the Hebrew perfect verbal form here (“has given”) to describe a future action as if it were a completed, past event. He was confident in the outcome because of God’s faithful word.

<sup>37</sup> Davis writes, “How accurate were biblical numbers, e.g., the 10,000 Moabites killed by the Israelites (Jdg 3:29), the 80 years of peace, (Jdg 3:30), or the 600 Philistines killed by Shamgar (Jdg 3:31)? Numbers found in Scripture functioned in several different ways. Some were intended to be precise, and were recorded as such (cf. Ezr 2). Other figures that may appear to be precise were, in fact, intended to be understood as approximations, and were often designated as such by the use of the adverb ‘about’ (e.g., the number of Israelites killed at the battle of Ai is recorded in Jos 7:5 as being ‘about 36’). Still other figures were intended to be understood as approximations, but were recorded without the use of the designating adverb ‘about’ (e.g., the 600 Philistines killed by Shamgar, here in 3:31, since it is unlikely that someone counted each person that Shamgar killed).”

<sup>38</sup> Verse 29 is difficult to interpret for two reasons. First, the word translated “thousand” can also mean “military unit” (cf. 20:10). Second, it is not clear whether the Israelites killed these Moabites as they tried to cross the Jordan on this occasion. Perhaps this was the total Moabite force that the Israelites killed in their war with Moab. In either case this was a great victory for Israel.

<sup>39</sup> Some biblical scholars fault Ehud for his treachery. But half-truths, lies, deception, and treachery are all part of holy war. Furthermore, Israel’s oppressors are as guilty as the Nazis who were sentenced to death by the war-crimes court at Nuremberg. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 598.



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<sup>40</sup> It is a mistake to see what happens here as a simple case of murder. This is not murder any more than the death of a soldier in battle is murder. Israel is at war. There is a truce in effect, but it is an imposed truce. Israel is an oppressed people. They are, in effect, slaves living under an army of occupation. Ehud assumes the role of a freedom fighter here, and kills the enemy, the number one enemy, of his people.

<sup>41</sup> Carolyn Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*. Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 147.

<sup>42</sup> McCann notes, “Like Shamgar, Samson also fought the Philistines. The writer devoted four chapters to Samson, but Samson did not accomplish in four chapters what Shamgar did in one verse. Samson did not deliver Israel. This comparison further demonstrates the pattern of progressive deterioration that characterizes the Book of Judges.” J. Clinton McCann, *Judges*. Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox, 2002), 48.

<sup>43</sup> “The name *Shamgar* is non-Israelite and may have been of Hittite or Hurrian origin. This does not automatically infer that he was a Canaanite, although this is possible; it may witness to the intermingling of the Israelites with the native population. In any case his actions benefited Israel.”

<sup>44</sup> Shamgar may have killed all 600 Philistines at one time in one place (see 2 Sam 8:8–12), but it’s also possible that 600 is a cumulative total.

<sup>45</sup> Younger writes, “Interestingly, the term ‘oxgoad’ (*malmad*) is focused on the causative stem of *Imd* (“learn”)—literally, ‘an instrument of instruction or learning.’ Thus there may be a play on words involved in the choice of the oxgoad. Sham teaches the Philistines at three or two. They, like, Eglon got the point of the lesson. Younger, *Judges, Ruth*, 129.

<sup>46</sup> Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 151.

<sup>47</sup> Eaton, *Judges and Ruth*, 24.