

October 18, 2026

“An Unlikely Deliverer”
Lesson 3

Judges 3:15-23, 30

Intro

The judges in the book of Judges are not court officials like today, but deliverers, raised by God to deliver His people from oppression. The Israelites defeated at least 31 kings and groups in the book of Joshua in conquering the Promised Land, but they were told in Joshua 13 that there were still many more to conquer. By the beginning of Judges, this mission has not been accomplished, with an angel of God telling them that their failure to finish the conquest amounted to disobedience (Judges 2:2).

The long-term result of the Israelites’ disobedience was a 300-year repeated pattern of sin, oppression, crying out, and God raising up deliverers. The first recorded deliverer judge was Othniel, who served 40 years in that role. When he died, the pattern re-surfaced, and Israel was oppressed by King Eglon of Moab, with help from the neighboring Amalekites and Ammonites. He ruled from the “City of Palms”—also known as Jericho. He likely set up court there to keep a close eye on Israel, whom he has oppressed for 18 years.

Read Judges 3:15-23

1. vs. 15a: Israel cries out to the Lord because of being oppressed

The usual phrase that leads to oppression is Israel “doing evil”

The usual identification of that evil is idolatry—worshipping false gods

Those false gods don’t deliver the people, so they cry out to God for help

God raises up Ehud, who is identified as being “left-handed”

It is uncommon for this detail to be used in describing someone in the Bible

It will be important later in this story

The description is a little ironic based on the other identifying information

Ehud is the “son of Gera the Benjaminte”

Benjamin means “son of my right hand”

The right hand signifies a place of honor, trust, and authority

Some suggest that being left-handed implies that Ehud is ambidextrous, using both hands

If that is true of him, that would make him a more dangerous warrior

Unlike other judges, there is no mention of God’s Spirit coming upon Ehud

His empowerment comes from the gifts God has already given him:

Valor, weaponry, cunning

2. vs. 15b: A tribute is gift of some kind given from subjugated people to the one who rules over them

Israel sends Ehud to Eglon king of Moab with a tribute gift

This could be anything from taxes owed to grain or livestock to an unusual artifact

Moab is on the southeastern side of the Dead Sea

There is already a long history of animosity between Moab and Israel

3. vs. 16: Ehud has made himself a weapon: a double-edged “sword”
It’s a cubit long, meaning 14-18 inches, which would fit along his thigh
It’s important to note the weapon is on his *right* thigh
Soldiers draw their weapons from across their bodies
A right-handed person would have their weapon on their *left* thigh
Guards would likely check only their left side of persons entering
It seems obvious that Ehud is trying to hide the weapon from discovery
4. vs. 17: Ehud comes into the king’s presence, and presents the tribute he has brought
Eglon is described as “a very fat man”
This could mean he is obese, but it also has other possible meanings
This same description is used of Daniel and friends after they eat only vegetables
It can refer to plumpness, rather than obesity
In Eglon’s case, it certainly implies that he is enjoying prosperity and abundance
5. vs. 18: Ehud has come to Eglon with a group
They have been the ones who physically carried the tribute
Once this deferential act has been done, they leave
6. vs. 19: Ehud appears to leave with the group, but then returns
The stone images mentioned in Gilgal are likely dedicated to local gods
When he reaches this place, he returns to Eglon alone
He says he has a secret message for the king, who dismisses all his attendants
Ehud has brought tribute and acted deferential; the king trusts this “servant”
Ehud has bought himself a chance to be alone with the king
7. vs. 20: King Eglon is in his “upper room”
This is a terrace built on a flat room with plenty of ventilation and breezes
It is a separate place from the king’s main audience chamber on the ground level
It is an excellent place for a personal conversation
Ehud’s message contains a double meaning
He says God has a message for Eglon
Eglon takes it to mean something beneficial to him
Ehud means it is God’s judgment for oppressing Israel
The king is intrigued with this message, and rises up from his seat
Kings do not usually rise to talk to inferiors
8. vs. 21: Ehud acts quickly, and the movement of his left hand to the weapon is likely of no concern
They end up close enough for Ehud to stab Eglon in his belly
9. vs. 22: Ehud pushes the blade in so far that the king’s belly fat closes over the entire weapon
Most knives/swords have a cross guard, which prevents the soldier’s hand from harm
It stops the hand from accidentally sliding onto the blade
This weapon must not have had one for the entire sword to be in the king’s belly

10. vs. 23: Ehud is able to leave without being caught

He closes the king's doors from the inside and locks them

This prevents the king from being found while Ehud makes his escape

11. vs. 30: After fleeing, Ehud calls Israel to arms and leads them into battle against the Moabites

He knows that losing their king will demoralize the people

They win the battle, making Moab subject to Israel

This remains the status quo for 80 years

This is the longest time of peace for Israel in all of Judges

Application: Through the judges, God shows his desire to partner with humanity. Although God seeks, saves, empowers, and redeems, he often desires to use His people in the process. Sometimes he finds a willing person, sometimes a reluctant person, and sometimes no one at all. There is a saying in Christian circles: "God does not call the qualified; he qualifies the called." Sometimes God prepares people for work they will do long before they know the details. Ehud is used to solve a problem which existed for 18 years. He planned diligently before acting in boldness. Waiting on God's timing is a fundamental exercise in faith, and it can take time, even years, before the Lord's solution or plans are revealed. In the meantime, we are called to keep our faith in His leading and power, follow the commands He has given, and trust the work He is doing.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for being our rescuer and redeemer. Thank You for preserving Your people despite cycles of unfaithfulness. Thank You for hearing us when we cry out to You. Prepare us for devoted service to You and to others. Hone our skills and talents so we will be ready when you call us to action. In Jesus' name, Amen.