

Judges

Chapter 3

These are the nations the LORD left to test all those Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars in Canaan ² (he did this only to teach warfare to the descendants of the Israelites who had not had previous battle experience): ³ the five rulers of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites living in the Lebanon mountains from Mount Baal Hermon to Lebo Hamath. ⁴ They were left to test the Israelites to see whether they would obey the LORD's commands, which he had given their forefathers through Moses. ⁵ The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁶ They took their daughters in marriage and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods.

3:1–6 The list of nations the Lord left roughly describes an arc along the western and northern boundaries of the area actually occupied by Israel at the death of Joshua (vv. 1–4). Within Israelite-occupied territory there were large groups of native peoples (v. 5; see 1:27–36) with whom the Israelites intermingled, often adopting their religions (v. 6). (CSB)

3:2 *only to teach warfare.* As his covenant servant, Israel was the Lord's army for fighting against the powers of the world that were settled in his land. In view of the incomplete conquest, succeeding generations in Israel needed to become capable warriors. "Only" probably here means "especially." (CSB)

The Lord wanted Israel to understand the physical and spiritual war in which they were engaged. Avoiding this spiritual war fare would result in no true peace at all. Luther: "The most dangerous trial of all is when there is no trial, when everything is all right and running smoothly. This is when a man tends to forget God, to become too independent and put his time of prosperity to a wrong use" (AE 44:47). (TLSB)

3:3 *five rulers.* The Hebrew for "rulers" is related to the word "tyrant" (see note on Jos 13:3) and is used only of Philistine rulers. These rulers had control of a five-city confederacy. At one point Judah defeated three of these cities (1:18) but was unable to hold them. (CSB)

Or, "princes," suggesting a distinctive political structure, different from both the tribal league of Israel and the Canaanite city-states. (TLSB)

Philistines. The only nation not native to the land. (TLSB)

Sidonians. Here used collectively of the Phoenicians. (CSB)

Hivites. Here identified with a region in northern Canaan reaching all the way to Hamath (see also Jos 11:3). (CSB)

Mount Baal Hermon. Probably Mount Hermon (see 1Ch 5:23). (CSB)

3:4 *testing ... obey the commandments of the LORD.* This test was not for the Lord's benefit but for the Israelites', to see if they would measure their actions against God's justice and the covenant He promised. (TLSB)

3:6 *took their daughters ... and served their gods.* See note on Jos 23:12. The degenerating effect of such intermarriage is well illustrated in Solomon's experience (1Ki 11:1–8). (CSB)

their. Canaanites, etc. (cf v 5). *they.* The Israelites. Intermarriage would lead Israel into pagan worship and idolatry. (TLSB)

3:1–6 Israel would no longer enjoy the blessings promised in Lv 26:1–13 and Dt 28:1–14 under the Lord's covenant; instead, the Israelites would find themselves engaged in a struggle against their pagan neighbors. How wonderful that God promises to stand by us, despite our wavering faith. "If we are faithless, He remains faithful—for He cannot deny Himself" (2Tm 2:13). • Merciful Father, assure us in Your faithfulness so that we live by faith in our Savior. Amen. (TLSB)

Othniel

⁷ **The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs.** ⁸ **The anger of the LORD burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram Naharaim, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years.** ⁹ **But when they cried out to the LORD, he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, who saved them.** ¹⁰ **The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, so that he became Israel's judge and went to war. The LORD gave Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him.** ¹¹ **So the land had peace for forty years, until Othniel son of Kenaz died.**

3:7–11 In the account of Othniel's judgeship the author provides the basic literary form he uses in his accounts of the major judges (i.e., beginning statement; cycle of apostasy, oppression, distress, deliverance; recognizable conclusion), adding only the brief details necessary to complete the report (see Introduction: Literary Features). (CSB)

3:7 *did evil in the eyes of the LORD.* A recurring expression (see v. 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1) used to introduce the cycles of the judges (see Introduction: Literary Features). (CSB)

Baals. See note on 2:13. (CSB)

Asherahs. See notes on 2:13; Ex 34:13. (CSB)

3:8 *anger of the LORD.* God’s anger was fueled by His jealous love for Israel and His keen disappointment for their failing to heed His warnings. (TLSB)

He sold them ... served. Note the language of slavery, to which the people had returned due to their unfaithfulness. (TLSB)

Cushan-Rishathaim. Probably means “doubly wicked Cushan,” perhaps a caricature of his actual name (see note on 10:6 regarding Baal-Zebub). (CSB)

Lit, “doubly wicked Cushan.” May have been a nickname or even a self-chosen designation. Cushan’s territory, identified with Aram, extended from northeast of the Sea of Chinnereth to the Taurus Mountains on the north and to the Euphrates River on the east. The first oppressor God sent against Israel was not the leader of a nearby confederation of city-states but an international power. (TLSB)

Aram Naharaim. See note on Ge 24:10. (CSB)

3:9 *they cried out to the LORD.* The Israelites’ cries of distress occurred in each recurring cycle of the judges (see Introduction: Literary Features). (CSB)

Not a cry of repentance but of distress. (TLSB)

Othniel. See 1:13. (CSB)

He had an established record of military success. A relative of Caleb, he provided a link to the past generation, which had remained faithful to the Lord. He married Achsah, the daughter of Caleb, an Israelite war hero (1:12–15). Othniel was not guilty of intermarriage with the Canaanite women or of sexual immorality (cf 3:6). The author does not mention any character flaws or motives of personal revenge of Othniel’s, which distinguishes him from other judges. (TLSB)

3:10 *Spirit of the LORD came upon him.* The Spirit empowered Othniel to deliver his people, as he did Gideon (6:34), Jephthah (11:29), Samson (14:6, 19) and also David (1Sa 16:13). Cf. Nu 11:25–29. (CSB)

The Spirit transformed the hearts of the judges (6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6; etc), though their sinful failings were not miraculously removed. The person and work of the Holy Spirit is more fully revealed in the NT. The Spirit always “calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies” people in faith and equips them for service. (TLSB)

into his hand. Victory comes from the Lord. (TLSB)

3:11 *the land had peace ... years.* A recognizable conclusion to the cycle of a judge (noted only here and in v. 30; 5:31; 8:28). After the judgeship of Gideon this formula is replaced by “led Israel ... years” (12:7; 15:20; 16:31). See Introduction: Literary Features. (CSB)

forty years. A conventional number of years for a generation (see Introduction: Background). (CSB)

It is unclear how long Othniel's career continued after this rescue. The "rest" he brought may have extended well beyond his death. Only once did the Israelites enjoy a period of rest longer than 40 years (cf v 30). (TLSB)

3:7–11 Othniel, the ideal judge, is God's first champion to rescue Israel from a powerful foreign oppressor. God gave Othniel His Spirit and victory. Today, our struggles with temptation and problems may at times seem greater than we are able to bear. We may feel overwhelmed, confused, hopeless. Yet God's grace is sufficient for us, and His power is made perfect in weakness (2Co 12:9). In times of struggle, God's blessings may become most apparent and most treasured. • Assure us, O Lord, that Your grace is sufficient for all our needs. Grant us Your Spirit and boldness Amen. (TLSB)

Ehud

¹² Once again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and because they did this evil the LORD gave Eglon king of Moab power over Israel. ¹³ Getting the Ammonites and Amalekites to join him, Eglon came and attacked Israel, and they took possession of the City of Palms. ¹⁴ The Israelites were subject to Eglon king of Moab for eighteen years. ¹⁵ Again the Israelites cried out to the LORD, and he gave them a deliverer—Ehud, a left-handed man, the son of Gera the Benjamite. The Israelites sent him with tribute to Eglon king of Moab. ¹⁶ Now Ehud had made a double-edged sword about a foot and a half long, which he strapped to his right thigh under his clothing. ¹⁷ He presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab, who was a very fat man. ¹⁸ After Ehud had presented the tribute, he sent on their way the men who had carried it. ¹⁹ At the idols near Gilgal he himself turned back and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." The king said, "Quiet!" And all his attendants left him. ²⁰ Ehud then approached him while he was sitting alone in the upper room of his summer palace and said, "I have a message from God for you." As the king rose from his seat, ²¹ Ehud reached with his left hand, drew the sword from his right thigh and plunged it into the king's belly. ²² Even the handle sank in after the blade, which came out his back. Ehud did not pull the sword out, and the fat closed in over it. ²³ Then Ehud went out to the porch; he shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them. ²⁴ After he had gone, the servants came and found the doors of the upper room locked. They said, "He must be relieving himself in the inner room of the house." ²⁵ They waited to the point of embarrassment, but when he did not open the doors of the room, they took a key and unlocked them. There they saw their lord fallen to the floor, dead. ²⁶ While they waited, Ehud got away. He passed by the idols and escaped to Seirah. ²⁷ When he arrived there, he blew a trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went down with him from the hills, with him leading them. ²⁸ "Follow me," he ordered, "for the LORD has given Moab, your enemy, into your hands." So they followed him down and, taking possession of the fords of the Jordan that led to Moab, they allowed no one to cross over. ²⁹ At that time they

struck down about ten thousand Moabites, all vigorous and strong; not a man escaped. ³⁰ That day Moab was made subject to Israel, and the land had peace for eighty years.

3:12–30 Ehud's triumph over Eglon king of Moab. The left-handed Benjamite was an authentic hero. All alone, and purely by his wits, he cut down the king of Moab, who had established himself in Canaan near Jericho. This account balances that of Samson in the five narrative units central to the book of Judges (see Introduction: Literary Features). (CSB)

3:12 *Eglon*. Means "little calf." Through his own stupidity, Eglon will become a sacrificial animal. (TLSB)

Moab. See note on Ge 19:33. (CSB)

Nation east of the Jordan, descended from the incestuous relationship of Lot and one of his daughters. (TLSB)

3:13 *Ammonites*. See note on Ge 19:33. (CSB)

Ammonites and the Amalekites. Ammon was descended from the incestuous relationship between Lot and one of his daughters; Amalek was descended from Esau, Jacob's brother (cf Gn 36:12). (TLSB)

Amalekites. These descendants of Esau (Ge 36:12, 16) lived in the Negev (Nu 13:29). See note on Ge 14:7. (CSB)

city of palms. Jericho. Nations east of the Jordan had gained a foothold by taking this important city, which had been rebuilt (cf Jsh 6:1–21) and stood by the fords of the river. (TLSB)

3:14 *Israelites*. Here mainly Benjamin and Ephraim. (CSB)

3:15 *a deliverer*. Hbr *moshia'*. A "savior" of his people, but not a "judge." (TLSB)

Ehud ... Benjamite. Benjamin means "son of the right hand," but Ehud himself was left-handed. (TLSB)

left-handed man. Left-handedness was noteworthy among Benjamites (see 20:15–16)—which is ironic since Benjamin means "son of (my) right hand." Being left-handed, Ehud could conceal his dagger on the side where it was not expected (see v. 21). (CSB)

Lit, "restricted in his right hand." Ehud rescued Israel in a tricky, "left-handed" way. Ironically, Ehud gained Eglon's trust by hand-delivering Israel's annual tribute payment. (TLSB)

tribute. An annual payment, perhaps of agricultural products (cf. 2Ki 3:4). (CSB)

Conquerors required regular payment from their vassal states, similar to the collection of taxes. (TLSB)

3:16 *made a double-edged sword.* During the period of the judges, Israelite weapons were often fashioned or improvised for the occasion: Shamgar's oxgoad (v. 31), Jael's tent peg (4:22), Gideon's jars and torches (7:20), the woman's millstone (9:53) and Samson's donkey jawbone (15:15). See 1Sa 13:19. (CSB)

a cubit in length. C 18–20 in long. (TLSB)

he bound it on his right thigh. A right-handed man would ordinarily strap a weapon to his left thigh. Ehud's restricted right hand seemed to render him too weak to be a threat to the Moabite guards, and they would not have considered checking his other thigh. (TLSB)

3:17 *a very fat man.* Sign of wealth and ease. Eglon is portrayed as susceptible to flattery and a victim of his own appetite.

3:18 *he sent away the people.* Ehud wanted to act alone. (TLSB)

3:19 *idols.* Lit. "carved (stone) things," a frequent Hebrew word for stone idols (see NIV text note). But here the reference may be to carved stone statues of Eglon, marking the boundary of the territory he now claims as part of his expanded realm—a common practice in the ancient Near East. (CSB)

Whether Eglon's palace was on the east or west side of the Jordan River, these idols seem to have served as road markers. (TLSB)

secret message. A ploy to get a private audience with Eglon. (TLSB)

all his attendants went out. That Eglon dismissed his attendants from the room is a sign of his trust in Ehud. Eglon's eagerness for the secret illustrates other weaknesses—greed and corruption. (TLSB)

3:20 *upper room.* Rooms were built on the flat roofs of houses (2Ki 4:10–11) and palaces (Jer 22:13–14), and had latticed windows (2Ki 1:2) that provided comfort in the heat of summer. (CSB)

Perhaps a room over the beams, a raised throne room that would catch the breeze. (TLSB)

from God. Ehud added these words to his original statement (v 19), speaking as though he were a prophet. Eglon may have regarded such a message with a mixture of dread and curiosity. (TLSB)

he arose. Presumably from his throne, though subsequent events suggest a toilet or latrine was nearby (v 24). (TLSB)

3:22 *the hilt also went.* Eglon's greedy body consumed and hid the sword. (TLSB)

which came out his back. Or “and the offal in his belly came out.” (CSB)

Ehud’s surprise attack and the deep thrust of his sword caused Eglon’s bowels to fail as he fell to his death. (TLSB)

3:23 *porch.* Ehud may have exited by the same way he entered, locking the door from the outside, or he may have locked the door from the inside, escaping over the side of a wall onto a porch or outer courtyard. (TLSB)

3:24 *Surely he is relieving himself.* Eglon’s attendants delayed, allowing Ehud additional time to escape. (TLSB)

3:25 *embarrassed.* Though originally considering vulgar thoughts, the attendants grew nervous as their king failed to emerge. (TLSB)

3:26–27 *beyond the idols.* At Gilgal, just north of Jericho, safely outside Moabite control. (TLSB)

Seirah ... the hill country of Ephraim. High ground in the heart of Israel. (TLSB)

3:28 *the LORD has given.* Ehud credited God with the success, in the manner of a sincere Israelite warrior. (TLSB)

taking possession of the fords. This move prevented the Moabites from sending reinforcements and also enabled the Israelites to cut off the Moabites fleeing Jericho. (CSB)

The crossing for the Jordan River, near the northern edge of the Salt Sea. (TLSB)

did not allow. Israel prevented Moabite soldiers from retreating to their own land and divided the fleeing soldiers. (TLSB)

3:30 *subdued.* As a vassal to Israel. (TLSB)

eighty years. Round numbers are frequently used in Judges (see Introduction: Background). (CSB)

3:12–30 The treachery-filled victory of Ehud over Eglon and the Moabites is told in greater detail than the account of Othniel’s victory over Cushan-rishathaim (vv 9–11). Although we may admire Ehud’s courage and ingenuity, his deceptive method in God’s name brings the sincerity of his confession about the Lord (v 28) into question. God uses the people available to Him to achieve His larger purposes, and God blesses us despite our misdeeds and selfish motives. In all things, He works for the good of those who love Him (Rm 8:28). • “I need Thy presence ev’ry passing hour; What but Thy grace can foil the tempter’s pow’r? Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be? Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me.” Amen. (*LSB* 878:2) (TLSB)

Shamgar

³¹ **After Ehud came Shamgar son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad. He too saved Israel.**

3:31 *Shamgar.* The first of six minor judges and a contemporary of Deborah (see 5:6–7). His name is foreign, so he was probably not an Israelite. (CSB)

Because this name does not seem to be Hbr in origin, Shamgar was probably not an Israelite. (TLSB)

son of Anath. Indicates either that Shamgar came from the town of Beth Anath (see 1:33) or that his family worshiped the goddess Anath. Since Anath, Baal’s sister, was a goddess of war who fought for Baal, the expression “son of Anath” may have been a military title, meaning “a warrior.” *oxgoad.* A long, wooden rod, sometimes having a metal tip, used for driving draft animals (see 1Sa 13:21). (CSB)

Well-attested Canaanite name, also found inscribed on an arrowhead found south of Bethlehem. A group of professional soldiers was known as the “sons of Anath” (cf Anathoth, 1Ch 7:8, 11); Shamgar may have been associated with them. Anath was also a deity worshiped from Egypt to Mesopotamia. (TLSB)

killed 600 of the Philistines. Possibly the total of Philistines he killed throughout his lifetime, rather than in any single campaign. (TLSB)

oxgoad. A pole, 8–10 ft long, with a metal, chisel-shaped blade, used by farmers to clean the plow blade and to prod oxen. It could serve as a weapon. (TLSB)

saved. The author does not call Shamgar a “judge.” (TLSB)

3:31 Almost everything about this one-verse summary differs from the surrounding accounts. There is no announcement that Israel did evil in the eyes of the Lord and no mention that they cried out to Him; no mention that the Lord raised up His person to save them, or that Shamgar was clothed with the Spirit, or that God acted in this judge’s behalf. Had the Israelites become so enmeshed in Canaanite culture that there were no Israelites to answer the Lord’s call? The company of men and women the Lord has called includes many common people (1Co 1:26). God can use even those whose parentage, education, or vocation are humble or obscure. When and where it pleases the Spirit of God, He can make judges out of farmers and apostles out of fishermen. • Lord, accomplish great outcomes through ordinary-looking vessels. Begin with me. Amen. (TLSB)