

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY – CHARLOTTE

I AM NOT LEFT-HANDED!

THE AMBIDEXTROUS SAVIOR, THE CALF-MAN KING,
AND THE EXEGESIS OF JUDGES 3:15-22

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Translation of Judges 3:15-22

¹⁵ Then the people of Israel^a cried out to the Lord,^b and the Lord raised up a savior^c for them, Ehud, a son of Gera, a son of Benjamin, an ambidextrous man.^d And then by his hand^e the people of Israel sent tribute^f to Eglon, King of Moab.

¹⁶ And Ehud made for himself^g a sword, and it had^h two edgesⁱ and was a cubit long,^j and he girded it under his garment upon his right thigh.

¹⁷ Then he brought the tribute^k to Eglon, king of Moab. And Eglon was a very fat man.^l

¹⁸ And when^m he had completedⁿ bringing the tribute, he sent the people who carried the tribute away.

¹⁹ But he turned back^o from the idols^p which were in Gilgal and he said, “I have a secret message^q for you, O King.” And he said, “Be silent,” and all who attended him^r went out.

²⁰ And Ehud came to him while^s he was sitting alone in his cool upper chamber.^t And Ehud said, “I have a message from God^u for you.” And he stood up^v from the seat.^w

²¹ Then Ehud stretched out his left hand^x and he took the sword from his right thigh and he thrust it into his belly.

²² And also the handle went in after the blade^y and the fat closed over the blade,^z because he did not draw the sword from his belly, and the dung came out.^{aa}

Justification of the Translation of Judges 3:15-22

a. The Hebrew expression בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל may be literally translated as “the sons of Israel,” but in this instance the expression refers to the collective whole, and it denotes “membership in a nation or family.”¹ Therefore, the gender-neutral translation “people” is to be preferred. The same construction appears again at the end of the verse.

b. When used with the preposition אל, the root קַע carries a directional sense in the Qal stem (“to [object]”).² The Israelites are not uttering a generic cry of lamentation, but a plea for deliverance specifically directed at YHWH.

c. The term here translated “savior” (עִשְׂרֵן), is typically translated “deliverer.”³ The alternative meaning has been selected for theological purposes. Ehud prefigures the true מָשִׁיחַ promised in the old covenant, and the translation “savior” best draws out this typological function. This will be discussed in more detail later.

¹ גַּם, *BDB*, 130.

² קַע, *HALOT*, 1:277.

³ See Judg 3:15: ESV, KJV, NASB, and NIV.

d. A common translation of this phrase is “a left-handed man,”⁴ but such a translation likely distorts the intended meaning. First, the Hebrew (אָפָר יְדֵי מִנְיָן) appears to be idiomatic, literally meaning some more akin to “impeded in his right hand,”⁵ or “restricted with regard to his right hand.”⁶ Additionally, the more common term for the left hand (שָׁמֶן), often accompanied by (תְּבִשָּׁה)⁷ is not used here, leaving the translator with three options: (1) this is simply a rarely used description for the same idea, (2) this a description of a physical impediment,⁸ or (3) this is meant to communicate a different idea altogether. There are several reasons to accept the third option. The LXX offers an interpretive translation by rendering this term ἀμφοτεροδέξιον (“[characterized by] two right hands”).⁹ If this translation is correct, then this is a statement about Ehud’s adaptable fighting skills and style, not a handicap or simple left-handedness.¹⁰ This is possibly connected to a special training regimen utilized by Benjaminite soldiers.¹¹ The tribe of Benjamin is said to possess an unusual number of left-handed warriors in Scripture. In Judg 20:16, 700 of the 26,700 soldiers of Benjamin are said to be left-handed slingers. In 1 Chr 12:2, it is said that some of David’s “mighty men” were Benjaminites who could “shoot arrows and sling stones with either the right or the left hand.” Around ten percent of people are naturally left-handed, and one percent of people are naturally ambidextrous. Yet in Judg 20:16, the tribe of Benjamin either falls woefully short of the natural rate of left-handedness or אָפָר יְדֵי מִנְיָן refers to ambidexterity, meaning they have nearly tripled the natural rate.¹² Given the obvious reference to ambidextrous warriors in 1 Chr 12:2, the solution that the tribe of Benjamin made a practice of training their fighters to use both hands seems more likely. Between the unusual wording of the Hebrew, the interpretive rendering of the LXX, and the repeating pattern of abnormally dexterous Benjaminites, the translation choice “ambidextrous” is to be preferred over “left-handed.” As Kenneth Way says, “Ehud is the only judge who is demonstrably *not* left-handed. As a trained assassin, Ehud serves as Israel’s secret weapon.”¹³

⁴ ESV, NASB, and Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 163.

⁵ Robert B. Chiscolm Jr., *A Commentary on Judges and Ruth* (KEL; Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2013), 181; Robert G. Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (AB; Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975), 86; Susan Niditch, *Judges: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 53; Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 171.

⁶ *Biblica Hebraica Quinta: quinta editione cum apparatu critic novis curis elabrat: Judges*. Natalio Fernandez Marcos, ed. (Madrid; Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2011), 49.

⁷ שָׁמֶן, *HALOT*, 3:1333.

⁸ Matthew Henry (*Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996], 105) posits that Ehud could not use his right hand “either through disease or disuse.” While this is not a common view today, Zony Zevit (“When Left Is Not Right: אָפָר יְדֵי מִנְיָן in Its Literary and Linguistic Contexts,” *Biblica* 101 [2020]: 190), points out that the usage of the term in Tannaitic Hebrew indicates the assumption of deformity.

⁹ Zony Zevit, “When Left Is Not Right,” 203.

¹⁰ Kenneth C. Way, *Judges and Ruth* (TTT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 36. Trent Butler (*Judges* [WBC 8; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009], 70) also notes that ambidexterity may be in view here, but he does not believe that this does/would add anything to the narrative.

¹¹ Hans Ausloos, “The Story of Ehud and Eglon in Judges 3:12-30: A Literary Pearl as a Theological Stumbling Block,” *OTE* 30 (2017): 228; Klaas Spronk, *Judges* (HCOT; Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2019), 112.

¹² Zevit, “When Left is Not Right,” 196-7.

¹³ Way, *Judges and Ruth*, 36. Original emphasis.

e. In this instance, the preposition **בְּ** seems to be carrying the sense of “instrument or means,”¹⁴ making the rarer translation “by” a better choice than the typical “in” or “at.”

f. The word translated here as “tribute,” **הַתְּנוּתָה**, is the same one used to describe “offerings” made to Yahweh (Gen 4:3-5; Exod 29:14). However, this should not be interpreted to mean that Israel was sending or was forced to send offerings of worship to Eglon. The word seems to be used in a similar way to its occurrence in Gen 43:26, in which Joseph’s brothers offer him **הַתְּנוּתָה** as a token of fealty and subservience.¹⁵ The necessity of this gift may have been a point of distress for the people of Israel,¹⁶ but due to the contextual likelihood that this is a gift of diplomatic subservience, “tribute” is a better translation choice than “offering.”

g. The **לְ** construction is often used spatially, meaning “to him.” However, here it is likely used in a reflexive sense, a use in which “the object of the preposition is always the same as the subject of the verb.”¹⁷ Therefore the translation “for himself” is to be preferred.

h. As with note f, there is again another alternative use of the **לְ** preposition. **לָקַל** may be literally translated “and to her,” but the properties of the sword (**בָּרָק**, a feminine singular noun) are in view here. Therefore, it is best translated possessively (“and it had”) because of the focus on qualities which the subject of the preposition possesses.¹⁸

i. **שְׁנַיִם פִּיוֹת** literally means “two mouths.” However, when used with the verb **בָּרַק** it refers to the edges of the blade.¹⁹ The emphasis on two edges brings into focus the purpose of the sword. It is meant for stabbing, not slashing.²⁰

j. The English words “and was” have been supplied for ease of reading. They are not found in the Hebrew but are implied by the verbless clause. The typical word for cubit, **הַמֵּא**, does not occur here but is instead replaced by **רַגְבָּה**, a *hapax legomenon* of undetermined meaning. Possibly a loan word from Jewish Aramaic, the word may indicate a short cubit or a span.²¹

¹⁴ Paul Joüon and Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2011), 486.

¹⁵ John Currid, *Genesis, Volume 2: Genesis 25:19-50:26* (EPSC; Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2003), 304.

¹⁶ While the precise use of the word is not identical, Webb points out that the Israelites being compelled to offer **הַתְּנוּתָה** to Eglon rather than Yahweh was likely cause for revulsion. (*The Book of Judges*, 171.)

¹⁷ Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew and Syntax*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 127-8. See also: NASB; ESV; Boling, *Judges*, 84; Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 163.

¹⁸ Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew and Syntax*, 126.

¹⁹ **הַמֵּא**, *HALOT*, 3:914.

²⁰ Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* (NAC 6; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 163.

²¹ **רַגְבָּה**, *HALOT*, 1:196. Commentators are divided on the exact length of the blade. Some believe the sword to be longer, usually around 18 inches (George F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (ICC; T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, UK, 1976 [1895]), 93; Boling, *Judges*, 86; Block, *Judges*, 163; Chisolm, *Judges and Ruth*, 182) while others believe the sword to be simply a long dagger, possibly 9-12 inches (Way, *Judges and Ruth*, 36; Spronk, *Judges*, 113). The size of the sword is not particularly important to the narrative nor should it be listed or speculated upon in translation, but the second option seems like a more appropriate weapon for the intended assassination. The blade must be smuggled into the palace twice without detection, and the smaller the blade, the higher the chance of success.

k. וַיַּקְרֹב is a Hiphil construction with a waw consecutive. “Then” has been selected to indicate the temporal relation to the preceding events. The ESV, NASB, and NIV all translate the verb as “presented.” The causative sense of the Hiphil stem, however, is best brought out with the translation “brought.”²² The point of emphasis is not the act of offering, but the arrival of the gifts.

1. Nearly every popular conservative Bible translation today translates the expression עַגְלָון אִישׁ בָּרִיא מִאָלָּא as something indicating Eglon’s noticeable girth.²³ However, this is not a universally held opinion among commentators. Some argue that Eglon was muscular and that the adjective בָּרִיא is actually meant to communicate a positive quality like a toned or enviable physique.²⁴ That Eglon will soon serve as a proverbial sacrificial lamb, however, makes the fattened calf imagery (Eglon’s name literally means calf-man)²⁵ seem quite appropriate.²⁶

m. The verb הִיא is often used with the waw consecutive to introduce a new chronological event. It is often translated “and it came about” (NASB), but the simpler “and when” (ESV) communicates the same idea in this context while providing a clearer and simpler translation. The opening verb is followed by כִּאֵשׁ, a combination of an inseparable preposition and the relative pronoun. Arnold and Choi identify this word as the typical introductory construction for a temporal clause in which the subordinate clause describes an action “that is contemporary with the main clause.”²⁷ The action of the subordinate clause (finishing the presentation of the tribute) is temporally and immediately connected to the action of the main clause (sending out the tribute carriers). The meaning of the כִּאֵשׁ construction has been implied through sentence structure.

n. In the Qal stem, כָּלֵה usually means to stop or finish, and some translators simply use the simple Qal meaning here.²⁸ In the Piel stem, which highlights “the bringing about of a state,”²⁹ the translation must reflect the directive action of Ehud. Therefore, “completed” is the best translation. The difference between the two options is subtle, but the latter is to be preferred as it does a slightly better job of demonstrating the unfolding nature of Ehud’s plan.

²² Webb (*The Book of Judges*, 163) and Chisolm (*Judges and Ruth*, 175) likewise translate the phrase as “brought.”

²³ See: ESV, NASB, KJV, NIV, and CSB.

²⁴ Way (*Judges and Ruth*, 36) argues for the “muscular” translation, while Butler (*Judges*, 70) takes a more limited, but still positive view, arguing that Eglon was “pleasingly plump.”

²⁵ Way, *Judges and Ruth*, 35; Graham S. Ogden, “Irony or Humor?—The Case of Ehud in Judges 3.12–30,” *BT* 53 (2002): 442–44.

²⁶ Spronk, *Judges*, 113–4.

²⁷ Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 189.

²⁸ Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 163, Niditch, *Judges*, 51. Of the approximately 210 appearances of כָּלֵה in the OT, 140 use the Piel stem. (כָּלֵה, *HALOT*, 2:477–8) To assume that the simple meaning is intended, a verb must appear “only (or almost exclusively) in the intensive-repetitive [Piel, Pual, and Hithpael] stems.” (Robert Bornmann, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* [New York: University Press of America, 1998], 174.) The absence of a compelling reason to assume the simple meaning leads us to conclude that a more obviously causative translation is the best choice.

²⁹ Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew and Syntax*, 53.

o. While not explicitly stated, it appears that Ehud leaves the palace and accompanies the gift bearers to this location in Gilgal. To ensure that the reader understands that from this point on Ehud and his fellow countrymen are separated, the conjunction is best translated “but.”

p. The proper translation of **הַפְּסִילִים** is a point of some debate. The term nearly always indicates a “divine image” fabricated from a material like wood, stone, or metal.³⁰ There is, however, a tradition that these stones were those set up by Joshua following the crossing of the Jordan River in Josh 4:20.³¹ If this monument to God’s guidance of his people is in view here, the translation “idols” is clearly inappropriate. However, this tradition is not well supported by modern commentators. The root **פָּל** carried negative connotations, making it a poor term by which to refer to such an important site.³² Other suggestions for what kind of location may be in sight here include: (1) a cultic worship site used in old Canaanite rituals,³³ (2) an undefined but still-used site of idol worship,³⁴ (3) a stone quarry,³⁵ or (4) the former center of Israelite worship under the leadership of Joshua (the location of their first campsite after crossing the Jordan river, but distinct from the monument set up by Joshua).³⁶ Of these options, the second is to be preferred, as the recurring reason for Israel’s subjugation in the book of Judges is idolatry (2:11; 3:7; 3:12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1).³⁷ This was likely a place where the people of Israel had been practicing the very idol worship that caused the Lord to allow their subjugation in the first place.³⁸ Therefore, the translation “idols” is the most appropriate option.

q. Block notes that the Hebrew expression **זָבָר-פְּתַר** is “delightfully ambiguous,” as the root **לָבָר** may also carry the sense of a “thing,” “object,” or “experience.”³⁹ His argument has merit, as the noun is translated as “matter,” “something,” or “word of God” in various places in the OT.⁴⁰ While an interesting linguistic observation (which will be discussed later), it is best to base the translation choice on the more common meaning “word.” “Message” maintains this meaning while fitting the flow of the surrounding narrative.

r. The Hebrew reads: **וַיֵּצְאוּ מִעַדּוֹ כָּל־קָרְבָּנִים עַלְיוֹ** (literally: “and they went out from on him, all who attended on him”). The preposition **עַל**, when translated with the most common meaning

³⁰ **לְפָסָל**, *HALOT*, 3:949.

³¹ Moore, *Judges*, 95. Moore himself casts doubt on the tradition, but he does mention it as a possibility.

³² Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 165.

³³ Way, *Judges and Ruth*, 37.

³⁴ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 165; Spronk, *Judges*, 115.

³⁵ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 2, trans. James Martin (Grand Rapid, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 296.

³⁶ Butler, *Joshua*, 39; 70.

³⁷ 3:12, 4:1, 6:1 and 13:1 do not contain a specific charge of idolatry, but the parallel constructions **אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים** (3:7) and **הָרָעַבְעִינִי יְהֹוָה** (3:12) indicate that the same transgression has been committed in both instances – serving “the Baals and the Asheroth.” (3:7) Similar phrasing is found in 4:1, 6:1, and 13:1.

³⁸ This does not exclude the possibility that other people groups also used the site for worship. Indeed, it would actually make sense for Israel to have fallen into idolatry along with their neighbors. It is quite possible that the Moabites would have seen this location as having cultic importance.

³⁹ Block, *Judges*, 165.

⁴⁰ **לָבָר**, *HALOT*, 1:211-2.

“on,”⁴¹ can make this phrase difficult to smooth out into English. However, **עַל** is a fairly adaptable word that “lends itself to a great variety of uses,” one of which is “proximity.”⁴² Considering that the verb literally describes the attendants’ exit from Eglon’s presence, this seems like a likely candidate for the proximate use of the preposition. Therefore, **עַל** may be understood to mean “to.” The construction is communicating that the attendants are no longer spatially proximate to the King. The ones attending (העָמִיקִים) is a definite active participle functioning as a substantive⁴³ near to him abandoned their posts.

s. The waw conjunction is not simply listing the next sequential action, but detailing “the circumstances under which a certain action takes place.”⁴⁴ As such it should be taken as a circumstantial conjunction and translated “while.”

t. The phrase **בְּעֹלִית הַאֲקָרֶה אֲשֶׁר-לֹ** is likely idiomatic. The word here translated as “upper chamber” seems to be a nominal form of the root **עָלָה**, which in its verbal form means to “ascend, go up.”⁴⁵ The further addition of the relative clause (literally “that was his”) indicates that this is some elevated space above the regular throne room especially reserved for the use of the king. Commentators are divided on the nature of this room, with some arguing that it is a raised partition within the larger throne room⁴⁶ and others stating that it is a different location within the palace, possibly a small room situated on the roof of the building.⁴⁷ Of these options, the second is to be preferred because (1) Eglon is very fat man whose body cannot be easily hid following the assassination, meaning that true privacy (greater than that provided by a partition) is vital to Ehud’s plan, and (2) ventilation (coolness) was more easily accomplished on the roof. Given this information, “his cool upper chamber” most accurately and efficiently describes the nature of the room in question.⁴⁸

u. In a moment of strategic linguistic thinking, Ehud refrains from using the distinctively Israelite name for God: **הָהָה**.⁴⁹ Instead, he tells Eglon: **לִי אֱלֹהִים לְךָ אֱלֹהִים** (“a word of God I have for you”). Eglon may have interpreted **אֱלֹהִים**, the plural form of the generic word for god, to mean that Ehud had a secret oracle from a Moabite god. The images at Gilgal may have been familiar to Eglon, meaning that Ehud’s recent journey past them would make his claim to divine revelation credible.⁵⁰ To ensure that the strategy behind Ehud’s word choice is preserved, “God” is the best translation – not “Lord,” because the covenant name is not

⁴¹ William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 272.

⁴² Joüon and Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 2:488.

⁴³ Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew and Syntax*, 94-5.

⁴⁴ Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew and Syntax*, 158.

⁴⁵ **עָלָה**, *HALOT*, 2:828.

⁴⁶ Block, *Judges*, 164-6; Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 173.

⁴⁷ Spronk, *Judges*, 115; Moore, *Judges*, 96.

⁴⁸ This follows the NIV (“upper room”), ESV (“cool roof chamber”), and NASB (“cool roof chamber”). Furthermore, Block notes that the NIV reading supports the “prevailing opinion” of a rooftop location (*Judges*, 165), and Webb concedes that the hypothetical partition “must have been substantial, and lockable” due to Eglon’s size (*The Book of Judges*, 173). Assuming the use of such a partition is unmerited given the existence of a much simpler, likelier option.

⁴⁹ Chisolm, *Judges and Ruth*, 183-4. Chisolm points out that such an utterance may have betrayed patriotic motivations behind Ehud’s request.

⁵⁰ Way, *Judges and Ruth*, 37.

used (and also because Lord is not within the semantic range of אֱלֹהִים),⁵¹ and not “god,” because Ehud is enacting the justice of הָרָה upon Eglon.

v. The subject of this verb is clearly Eglon due to the prior clarification that Eglon was the one sitting down. The primary definition of the verb **וַיַּעֲלֹם** is “to rise,” but the alternative definition “stand up”⁵² has been chosen because the emphasis is on the ease with which Ehud may now stab Eglon.⁵³ Especially if Eglon is rather portly, a single stab is unlikely to kill him because access to critical strike points is limited. However, the elongation of the torso required to assume a standing position would likely make it easier for Ehud to lacerate Eglon’s vital organs. It is likely that Ehud’s invocation of divinity made Eglon stand up in reverence.⁵⁴ He has unwittingly positioned himself as a calf to be slaughtered for the sake of divine justice.

w. The noun **אָרוֹן** may mean either a generic seat or a royal throne.⁵⁵ The translation is functionally connected to the kind of room in which the events take place. If one assumes the room is a partitioned section of the throne room, then “throne” is the natural choice.⁵⁶ If, however, as established in justification note s, the room is a separate chamber on the roof of the palace, then “seat” is preferable.⁵⁷

x. Unlike in verse 15, when Ehud's possible left-handedness is introduced, the actual term for the left hand appears here in verse 21: וַיַּשְׁלַח אֶחָד יָד שָׁמָלֶלֶת. The Hebrew verb is possibly derived from an Akkadian word meaning, among other things, to "hurl weapons." When used along with יָד, it means stretch out in order to grasp something.⁵⁸ It is the same language used of David in 1 Sam 17:49 when he removes his sling and stones from his bag (וַיַּשְׁלַח אֶחָד יָד).⁵⁹ This is preparatory language indicating impending violence. The foolishly trusting Eglon is now surprised when Ehud draws a sword with what was assumed to be his weak hand (see justification note c).

y. Spronk notes that short thrusting swords were common in the ANE,⁶⁰ and Way helpfully states: “the design may be analogous to the longer Naue Type II sword...⁶¹ which was double edged, made of one piece, and typically lacked a cross guard, which would allow the hilt to penetrate the victim.”⁶² A combination of a skillful, powerful strike and a well-crafted blade with no cross guard to impede its progress into the flesh would send the hilt (the handle) of the sword into the belly along with the blade itself. To account for possible modern confusion about what a “hilt” might be, “handle” has been chosen for clarification.

⁵¹ אלְהִים, *HALOT*, 1:53.

⁵² בְּקָר, *HALOT*, 3:1086.

⁵³ Chisolm, *Judges and Ruth*, 185.

⁵⁴ Butler, *Judges*, 71; Ferdinand Deist, "'Murder in the Toilet' (*Judges 3:12-20*): Translation and Transformation," *Scriptura* 58 (1996): 265; Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 173.

⁵⁵ נִפְאָה, *HALOT*, 2:487-8.

⁵⁶ Webb, *Judges*, 163.

⁵⁷ Spronk, *Judges*, 115.

⁵⁸ שלח, *HALOT*, 4:1511.

⁵⁹ Chiscolm, *Judges and Ruth*, 197.

⁶⁰ Spronk, *Judges*, 113.

⁶¹ For an image of this weapon, see figure 1.

⁶² Way, *Judges and Ruth*, 36.

May, 1878, and June, 1879.

z. While popular English translations are in agreement that Ehud stabbed Eglon in the fatty part of the torso,⁶³ the graphic nature of this account has led to some revulsion and alternative translations. For example, Josephus recounts that Ehud won the king's confidence through the frequent presentation of gifts, and then "smote him to the heart" when the opportunity presented itself.⁶⁴ This retelling is clearly derived from the historian's own preferences and is unsupported by any manuscript evidence. The modern translator and exegete may safely take the words chosen at face value.

aa. Critical scholar George Moore considered this final phrase to be "very difficult, and almost certainly corrupt,"⁶⁵ and even conservative scholars widely disagree on the meaning of the text.⁶⁶ The BHS reads נִיצָא הַפְּרַשְׁנָה ("it went out the dung/dirt"), which the LXX translates as καὶ ἐξῆλθεν Αώδ τὴν προστάδα ("and Ehud went out to the porch").⁶⁷ Moore suggests that Ehud cannot be in focus as his exit is described in the next phrase. He additionally speculates that the Greek gloss may also have been corrupted over time.⁶⁸ Unlike the situation in verse 15, in which the LXX seems to be translating an idiom possibly attested to in other places in Scripture, there is no compelling reason to take the LXX reading as the intended meaning of the Hebrew. The translation "dung" is further supported by the events of verse 24. The servants, unable to enter the locked chamber, assume that Eglon is "relieving himself."⁶⁹ The possible stench of excrement may have led to this assumption on the part of the servants.⁷⁰ Between the lack of support for other readings and the narrative flow of the passage, there is ample reason to trust the originality of the "dirt/dung" reading of הַפְּרַשְׁנָה.

⁶³ See Judg 3:22: ESV, NASB, KJV, NIV, and CSB.

⁶⁴ Josephus, *Ant.* 5:193-197.

⁶⁵ Moore, *Judges*, 97.

⁶⁶ Way (*Judges and Ruth*, 37-38) believes that the object in view is the blade passing through Eglon's back, stating: "In general, the popular scatological readings of this story are overemphasized in scholarship, especially for the final clause of verse 22." Webb (*The Book of Judges*, 164) translates נִיצָא הַפְּרַשְׁנָה as "dirt," but believes the word to be a reference to excrement. Chisolm (*Judges and Ruth*, 177; 186) believes נִיצָא הַפְּרַשְׁנָה to be "a technical architectural term" and translates the phrase "and he went out into the vestibule."

⁶⁷ Clearly translations such as Chisolm's are informed by the LXX reading.

⁶⁸ Moore, *Judges*, 98.

⁶⁹ נִיצָא הַפְּרַשְׁנָה, literally "he is uncovering his feet." This is likely a euphemism referring to the practice of using one's robe to maintain privacy when going to the bathroom. (Way, *Judges and Ruth*, 37.) Eric Christianson ("A Fistful of Shekels: Scrutinizing Ehud's Entertaining Violence (Judges 3:12-20)," *BibInt* 11 [2003]: 63.) goes so far as to suggest that Ehud approached Eglon while the king use was using the chamber pot and that the fecal matter in question was already on its way out of Eglon's body. This is both needlessly crass and narratively absurd. Eglon already knows that Ehud's "message" may have a divine origin, and he has sent his attendants away so that he may receive it in private. Unless Eglon is some sort of tactless, mannerless, and oblivious "stupid fatty," (Spronk, *Judges*, 114) there is no reasonable evidence that would lead one to assume the Moabite king would consider this to be an appropriate time to relieve himself. Christianson's suggestion may be rightfully disregarded.

⁷⁰ Ogden, "Irony or Humor?," 443; Spronk, *Judges*, 116; Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* (BO; Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2000), 51.

Context of Judges 3:15-22

Historical Context

The period of the Judges follows after the conquest of Canaan depicted in Joshua and predates the era of the united monarchy. The length of years covered by the book is dependent on the date of the Exodus and the conquest under Joshua. If the Exodus is early (1446 BC), then the book of Judges covers over 400 years of pre-monarchical history ranging from 1375-1092 BC.⁷¹ If, however, one assumes a late date for the Exodus and ensuing conquest, then the era of the judges must take place from 1200-1042 BC.⁷² Determining the exact date of Ehud's deliverance of and administration over Israel is not vital to the immediate exegetical task, but as the account is presented as an historical occurrence and contained within the historical records of Israel, understanding its approximate date does help when considering the finer historical details (the kind of sword Ehud used) or Ehud's chronological relationship to other OT events. As the second judge presented in the book, Ehud almost certainly lived earlier in this period, when the conquest of Canaan was a recent memory.

Literary Context

The book of Judges recounts the history of the Israelites following the conquest of Canaan. It is a very cyclical book, as 2:11-16:31 all recount various periods of peace, idolatry, subjugation, and deliverance at the hand of a major or minor judge.⁷³ Ehud's story is

⁷¹ Michael J. Glodo, "Judges," in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised*, ed. Miles V. Pelt (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 178. This approach has the advantage of being able to add up the years of the judge's various administrations and take the resulting number (410) at face value. The present writer holds this view.

⁷² P.E. Satterthwaite, "Judges," DOTHB 591. Satterthwaite notes that adopting this position requires the assumption that the judges ruled over factions or tribes within Israel and that some may have "overlapped chronologically." (590)

⁷³ Glodo, "Judges," 179-81. Glodo notes that Abimelech, the conspirator and self-appointed leader, is "not truly a judge." (181)

the second repetition of this cycle, following after the story of Othniel and preceding the extremely short account of Shamgar.⁷⁴ It bears mention that **שׁׁפֵט**, the usual title for a judge, appears nowhere in the Ehud account. Does this mean that Ehud should not be considered a judge? An analysis of Ehud's entire story (3:12-30) indicates that he has every claim to the title. He is raised up by God for the role, subdues the enemy, and brings about an unprecedented 80 years of peace. Ehud rightly deserves his place among the judges.

Issues in Judges 3:15-22

Ehud's Morality

That Ehud's actions bring about deliverance for Israel is beyond doubt. The sneaky, perhaps dishonest nature of Ehud's actions, however, do raise an important question: is Ehud the protagonist? Should his actions be viewed as morally justified? Making the case that Ehud should be viewed in a negative light, Gregory Wong points out the many parallels between Ehud and Joab, David's general and a two-time assassin.⁷⁵ In 2 Sam 3:26-30, Joab murders Abner after pulling him aside for a private conversation. In 2 Sam 20:8-10, Joab murders Amasa, a general who took Joab's place as leader of David's army (2 Sam 19:13), with a sword thrust from his left hand. Aside from the obvious secret and left-handed parallels, Wong points out that all three assassinations required prior planning⁷⁶ and that both Eglon's and Amasa's deaths include grotesque details about the interior contents of their bodies seeing the light the light of day.⁷⁷ Wong argues that these parallels "represent conscious design on the part of one of the authors,"⁷⁸ and later concludes that "since the allusions seem

⁷⁴ The entirety of Shamgar's story is given in Judg 3:31: "After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed 600 of the Philistines with an oxgoad, and he also saved Israel." (ESV)

⁷⁵ Gregory T. K. Wong, "Ehud and Joab: Separated at Birth?," *VT* 56 (2006): 399-412.

⁷⁶ Wong, "Ehud and Joab," 401.

⁷⁷ Wong, "Ehud and Joab," 403.

⁷⁸ Wong, "Ehud and Joab," 403.

to concentrate especially on the use of deception, one can only conclude that this use of deception by Ehud must have been what was viewed negatively by the author of the Joab accounts.”⁷⁹

There are ample reasons to reject Wong’s thesis, however. Robert Chisolm helpfully demonstrates that the proper parallel for viewing the Ehud account is not Joab, but Othniel, the protagonist of the preceding cycle of sin and deliverance.⁸⁰ Of the many leaders listed in book of Judges, only Othniel (3:10), Gideon (6:34), Jephthah (11:29), and Samson (13:24-25) are explicitly said to have the spirit of the Lord upon them. Of these, only Othniel is termed a **יָשִׁירֵן**, a deliverer or savior.⁸¹ According to Chisolm, “the narrator presented Ehud in a thoroughly positive light and linked him with Othniel to form a paradigmatic tandem.”⁸² Additionally, while the assassinations of Eglon by Ehud and of Amasa by Joab contain “similarity of action,” Chisolm contends that the identity of the victims and the consequences of their actions set the two individuals apart: “Ehud killed a foreign oppressor and delivered a nation; Joab killed a Benjamite, thereby escalating tribal conflict, and his own flesh and blood, thereby contributing to the disintegration of the Davidic royal court.”⁸³ Ehud is not a villain, but a hero. Ehud was raised up by God, trained from a young age to defend his people, and brought peace to Israel for 80 years. Joab, on the other hand, was a self-seeking man of violence who murdered his own countrymen to advance his personal interests.

⁷⁹ Wong, “Ehud and Joab,” 410.

⁸⁰ Robert B. Chisolm, “Ehud: Assessing an Assassin,” *BibSac* 168 (2011): 274-82.

⁸¹ **יָשִׁירֵן**, *HALOT*, 2:562. Furthering the point that this title implies divine approval, the term **יָשִׁירֵן** is translated as **σωτήρ** in the LXX (“the one who rescues, savior, deliverer, preserver” [σωτήρ, *BDAG*, 985]). Both Israel’s OT deliverers and the promised savior are given the same title. Ehud is not only approved by God, he also foreshadows the true **σωτήρ**. (David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Luke,” *Commentary on the New Testament’s Use of the Old Testament*, D. A. Carson and G. K. Beale, eds. [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007], 266.)

⁸² Chisolm, “Ehud,” 282.

⁸³ Chisolm, “Ehud,” 282.

Indeed, Joab's life was so violent that one of David's final acts was to have Solomon execute the former general.⁸⁴ Ehud is a true protagonist and an example of courageous action in the face of wickedness, oppression, and idolatry.

Seductive Subtext and Fecal Details

Another concern to address is why this passage contains such vivid, even repulsive, details. Within the 19 verses given to Ehud's story, his lineage, dexterity, weaponry, plan, action, battle, and rule are all at least mentioned. This account is so full of detail, in fact, that some scholars read sexual overtones into the provided information. Susan Niditch sees a reference to genitalia in the length and location of the sword, a sexual proposition in Ehud's "secret message," and argues that Eglon is effectively raped – "unmanned in this way, feminized" – by the penetration of the sword into his belly.⁸⁵ Echoing Niditch's thoughts, Timothy Koch additionally argues that Ehud's supposed left-handedness would have rendered him less of a man in the eyes of his peers and that the revealing of the sword was meant to be a sexual tease of sorts.⁸⁶ This interpretation is unwarranted. Klaas Spronk argues that such a proposition on the part of Ehud (real or manipulative) is "unlikely," offering the counterpoint that, "it was precisely the fact that Ehud had returned from idols that made Eglon curious."⁸⁷ Furthermore, in all other OT uses of the verb **שָׁׁמַע** (silence),⁸⁸ the context always implies that the silence is "sacred," commanded in reverence for YHWH.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Ehud's death is not recorded in scripture, but we may safely assume that he died sometime in the 80 years of peace. Joab, however, was executed while he "caught hold of the horns of the altar" in the Tabernacle courtyard. (1 Kgs 2:28) It is not a coincidence that Ehud enacts God's justice on Eglon, the "calf-man," while Joab is literally slaughtered next to the altar of the Lord for his violent and conspiratorial dealings.

⁸⁵ Niditch, *Judges*, 58.

⁸⁶ Timothy, R. Koch, "A Homoerotic Approach to Scripture," *T&S* 14 (2001): 21.

⁸⁷ Spronk, *Judges*, 115.

⁸⁸ See: Neh 8:11; Zeph 1:7; Zech 2:17; Hab 2:20; Amos 8:3.

⁸⁹ **שָׁׁמַע**, *HALOT*, 1:253.

Therefore, Eglon's enthusiasm to grant Ehud an audience should be interpreted as the action of a devout idol worshipper, and Niditch and Koch's interpretation may be disregarded.

The graphic detail seemingly tacked on to the end of the account, the fecal matter leaving Eglon's body, causes some to balk. Some believe that this translation is errant or that the text has been corrupted (these concerns have been addressed in translation justification note z). However, some interpreters, instead of doubting the text, doubt the common interpretation and cast doubt on the “scatological” reading of the passage.⁹⁰ The Hebrew construction **הַפְּרַשְׁתָּנָה**, however, requires the exegete to make themselves comfortable with the repulsive (yet still included) detail. This word should be seen as deriving from the noun **פְּרַשָּׁה**, which refers to the contents of a sacrificial animal's intestines.⁹¹ Eglon, the calf-man, is the sacrifice required for the liberation of Israel. Therefore, this detail should not be overlooked, de-emphasized, or reinterpreted. It should be appreciated as further confirming, in a visceral way, the justice of the divine action taken against Eglon. With the macro-level issues now addressed, the passage will now be approached homiletically.

Preaching Judges 3:15-22

Homiletical Idea

The story of Ehud is one of cunning, action, and vengeance. It tells the story of a man who commits a violent act against an indulgent oppressor through deceptive practices. In keeping with many pericopes in the book of Judges, it is gory and graphic – painting a mental picture that the reader, preacher, or congregant may find unsettling. Finding the meaning in

⁹⁰ Way, *Judges*, 38.

⁹¹ **פְּרַשָּׁה**, *HALOT*, 3:977; Ausloos, “The Story of Ehud and Eglon,” 233. The BHQ commentary argues that the word comes not from the Hebrew **פְּרַשָּׁה** but from the Akkadian *prsd* (to escape). This is used to further the argument that the end of 22 is a doublet to accompany the beginning of 23. (*Biblical Hebraica Quinta*, 50) We admit that at some point one must make a leap of faith about the etymology of the word used here, but the theological implications of **פְּרַשָּׁה** meaning sacrificial entrails is – if unpleasant from a sensory perspective – a compelling reason to agree with the majority of modern translations.

this text for the modern believer takes some work, but faithful exegesis reaps bountiful rewards in this case. Ehud, the “savior” YHWH raises up for his people, demonstrates that *God is at work through the work of His people*. This implies a *practical* call to responsible Christian living, foreshadows the unexpected nature of God’s *soteriological* plan, and anticipates the *eschatological* victory of the true savior. The story of Ehud demonstrates that a sovereign God is at work through and around the actions of his people. This will be demonstrated by a consideration of the passage in greater detail.

Preparation – 3:15-16

The story of Ehud opens with a cry of pain on the part of God’s people. Repentance for sins is not yet described, however.⁹² Yahweh, from his throne in heaven, hears the pained cries of helplessness emanate from his people unaccompanied by a full realization of their transgression. For this undeserving and unrepentant people, however, he raises up a מושֵׁל, a savior, to deliver them from their oppression. This term is elsewhere used to articulate the absence of hope and salvation apart from the action of YHWH,⁹³ so we see that Ehud is himself a representation of God’s salvific work for the sake of unrepentant people.

Ehud is an unexpected choice for a deliverer. He is a member of one of the smallest tribes of Israel. This Benjamite, literally a “son of the left hand” (בן־הַמִּנְיָן), lives up to the name by being able to utilize his left hand with dexterity and skill. There is some debate over the nature of this dexterity,⁹⁴ but the tradition that the tribe of Benjamin trained warriors to fight using their weak hand leads us to understand that Ehud is artificially ambidextrous,

⁹² Block, *Judges*, 159.

⁹³ מְשִׁלֵּן, *HALOT*, 2:562. See: 2 Sam 22:41; Ps 18:42; Is 43:11; 45:21; Hos 13:4.

⁹⁴ Some interpret this phrase to mean Ehud was naturally left-handed. (Moore, *Judges*, 93; Boling, *Judges*, 86.) This option is unlikely due to the language used to describe Ehud’s dexterity. Additionally, the solution that Ehud was handicapped in his right hand is not acceptable because the same language describes the slingers in Judg 20:16. (Block, *Judges*, 161.) For a fuller rationale for the “ambidextrous” translation, see justification note c.

having trained his hand from a young age in order to gain an advantage on the battlefield.⁹⁵

This practice violated several taboos prevalent in the ancient world. The right hand was associated with strength and even given ritual preference.⁹⁶ That Ehud would willingly take on left-handed qualities demonstrates his dedication to defending the covenant people of God. Social attitudes about dexterity were a secondary, possibly non-existent, concern when the deliverance of his people was at stake. The nature of Ehud's sword has already been discussed, but it bears mentioning that, like his training of the left hand, Ehud carefully and purposefully prepares himself and his weapons to carry out his mission. Ehud has not been given explicit instructions about what actions he must take,⁹⁷ so he utilizes his own knowledge and skills to fulfill his calling as a *מָשִׁיחָ*.

Presentation – 3:17-18⁹⁸

Ehud now transforms from a scheming revolutionary into a diplomat and supplicant. Temporarily veiling his liberating intentions, Ehud leads a procession of Israelites bearing tribute to Eglon. This was likely a difficult act of fealty to preform, as Eglon's very shape was evidence of his oppression of the people of Israel. That the Moabite king is so fat indicates that he has grown large at the expense of God's covenant people.⁹⁹ However, Ehud understands that this is the best way to gain the king's confidence. It is likely that the retinue of tribute bearers was much larger than necessary as a way to signal respect for Eglon and

⁹⁵ Zevit, "When Left is Not Right," 200. Niditch (*Judges*, 57) notes that the Greek city-state of Sparta engaged in a similar practice.

⁹⁶ Niditch, *Judges*, 57. Niditch further extrapolates that the Mosaic law contains instructions commanding special attention be given to the right side of the sacrificial animal (Exod 29:20; Lev 7:32).

⁹⁷ This is a noticeable contrast with the explicit instructions given to other judges like Barak (4:6) and Gideon (6:16; 6:25; 7:2-9).

⁹⁸ While the present writer stands by the translation choice "brought" for verse 17 (see justification note k), the alliterative flow of preparation, presentation, and propitiation is a useful homiletical strategy and, because the difference between the two translation choices is actually quite small, this framing is unlikely to cause confusion for the hypothetical congregation.

⁹⁹ Chisolm, *Judges and Ruth*, 183.

flatter his ego.¹⁰⁰ In this way, the tribute bearers were themselves “beguilers,”¹⁰¹ aiding their soon-to-be savior to earn Eglon’s trust. It is also likely that Ehud predominantly used his right hand while offering this tribute to Eglon, thereby concealing the dexterity that will soon exact justice upon the Moabite king. Ehud, pretending that his mission is now over, leaves with the offering bearers and heads back toward Israelite-occupied land.

Propitiation – 3:19-22

As the story of the assassination enters its third act, Ehud turns around at a place of idol worship. The continued existence of this shrine to idolatry is a reminder of the reason for Israel’s subjugation, as these places were supposed to be destroyed during the initial conquest (Deut 12:2-4). What should have been anathema to the people of Israel had become tolerated or even celebrated.¹⁰² That Ehud turned back at this shrine is important, as it lends credence to his later claim that he has a divine message for Eglon.¹⁰³ Having appeased the calf-man’s ego with presents and pomp, Ehud now heads back to Eglon’s court with divine justice to enact.

The apparently divine origin of Ehud’s message piques the king’s interest. Ehud’s recent trip past the Gilgal shrine combined with the expression **לבר-קתר** both indicate that the supposed Israelite diplomat has been in communication with a deity.¹⁰⁴ It is this enticing possibility that leads Eglon to silence and dismiss his attendants. Retreating to his private

¹⁰⁰ Moore, *Judges*, 93-4. Moore suggests that the black obelisk of Shalmaneser, which depicts the Israelite king Jehu offering tribute to his Persian superior, offers an accurate glimpse of what this scene may have looked like.

¹⁰¹ Schneider, *Judges*, 50.

¹⁰² Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 165; Way, *Judges and Ruth*, 37.

¹⁰³ Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 173.

¹⁰⁴ **קתר**, HALOT, 2:772. This noun encompasses a range of meanings, and can refer to a hiding place, covering, protection, or secret. The verbal form implies not only secrecy but mysterious or divine origin. It is likely that Elihu used this word to allow Eglon to supply his own favored meaning. Both men understood the divine implications of the word choice, but they had different understandings of the content of the “secret message.”

rooftop chamber, Eglon's hope for a divine message is confirmed. He is told that אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהִים has a message precisely for him. As noted earlier, this use of אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהִים instead of יְהֹוָה indicates the strategic thinking that has gone into Ehud's plan. The latter term would betray Ehud's covenantal loyalties, while the former may refer to "a god" or even "any god at all."¹⁰⁵ Eglon, likely out of reverence for a Moabite deity, rises, presenting himself as a "sacrificial animal to its slaughterer."¹⁰⁶

In a gruesome conclusion, the assassination culminates with the calf-man falling "like a fatted calf, by the knife, an acceptable sacrifice to divine justice."¹⁰⁷ Eglon meets the same fate as the offering of Lev 1, only instead of the entrails being washed so that the sacrifice may become "a pleasing aroma to the Lord," (Lev 1:9, ESV) Eglon is left in a soiled state. Eglon does not serve as a substitute in the same sense as the Levitical sacrifices, making and signifying atonement for transgressions, but merely as a substitute recipient of the suffering endured by Israel. The idolatry itself has yet to be expunged, but, at least for now, the idolatrous oppressor of God's people bears the penalty instead of the covenant-breakers. That the idolatry soon returns (Judg 4:1) indicates the insufficiency of temporal political freedom to bring about covenant faithfulness, but the faithfulness of YHWH in exacting justice is on full display here.

Modern Meaning and Application

As previously mentioned, the account of Ehud has practical, soteriological, and eschatological implications. Practically, Ehud is an example of faithful action in the absence of clear divine instruction. For those living in the new covenant era, in which "[the Word of

¹⁰⁵ בָּאֵלָה and מִבָּאֵלָה, HALOT, 1:52.

¹⁰⁶ Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 173.

¹⁰⁷ Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 106.

God] does not come anymore... but *has come* in Christ and remains,”¹⁰⁸ the lack of obvious direction may feel paralyzing. It is one thing for Abraham to know he must move to the land God will show him (Gen 12:1), for David to allow Solomon to build the Temple at God’s command (2 Sam 7:12-13), or even for the wise men from the east to decline to report to Herod due to a divinely sent dream (Matt 2:12), but what are those lacking obvious prophetic instruction to do in the face of injustice, oppression, sin, evil, and death? Like Ehud, they may take responsibility and trust that the Lord is at work.

Explaining the apparent lack of difficulty that Ehud faces, Yairah Amit writes: “the narrator makes a special effort to convince the reader of an existing ‘double causality,’ which explains that the success of human planning is preconditioned by God’s will and power.”¹⁰⁹ The explicit action of Ehud does not preclude the implicit action of God. As Barry Webb states, there is “double causation” at work, “Yahweh raised up a deliverer (divine initiative), and by his hand the Israelites sent a tribute to Eglon (human instrumentality).”¹¹⁰ The lack of a clearly prophetic word does not mean that God was not at work, merely that Ehud was the instrument by which God worked. The new covenant believer may rest assured that God is at work. He *has* spoken, so the Christian life may be lived practically, wisely, and boldly.

The story of Ehud also serves as an OT glimpse of the soteriological plan more fully realized in the NT. The apostle Paul attributes the qualities of a *ישׁרָאֵל* to Christ, saying in Acts 13:23: “Of this man’s [David’s] offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior

¹⁰⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Abridged in One Volume*, John Bolt, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 95. Original emphasis.

¹⁰⁹ Yairah Amit, “The Story of Ehud (Judges 3:12-30): The Form and the Message,” in *Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus*, ed. J. Cheryl Exum (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1989), 99.

¹¹⁰ Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 171.

[σωτῆρα],¹¹¹ Jesus, as he promised.” The promise in question, likely 2 Sam 7:12,¹¹² guarantees God will “raise up” David’s offspring to establish the throne of his kingdom forever. In the story of Ehud, we see God keeping this promise to David *long before* David’s ascension to the throne by preserving the nation of Israel. God’s promise of a savior has been guaranteed since eternity past and typified repeatedly throughout redemptive history. The plan of salvation is not a novelty but one of the foundational truths of history.

Ehud’s story also models the classic Reformed understanding of conversion and continuing sanctification. John Calvin pulled no proverbial punches when he emphatically stated: “The covenant of life is not preached equally to all, and among those to whom it is preached, does not always meet with the same reception. This diversity... is without doubt subordinate to God’s purpose of eternal election.”¹¹³ Yet this same man who so emphasized “gratuitous election” and “blessed predestination”¹¹⁴ also dedicated several chapters of his *magnum opus* to “point out the method by which a pious man may be taught how to frame his life aright.”¹¹⁵ The sovereign working of God is not incompatible with human freedom and responsibility. Rather, it enables it. By choosing to hone the dexterity of his left hand, Ehud was preparing for the work God had sovereignly ordained for him to do. Likewise, a strong belief in the sovereignty of God need not lead to passivity in evangelism or personal holiness in the Christian life.

Lastly, the story of Ehud also informs our eschatological expectations. If Ehud is, like many figures and images of the OT, a type of the true savior (Heb 9:23), then we can and

¹¹¹ For a consideration of the theological connection between γένος and σωτήρ, see footnote 81.

¹¹² I. Howard Marshall, “Acts,” *Commentary on the New Testament’s Use of the Old Testament*, D. A. Carson and G. K. Beale, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 584.

¹¹³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 607.

¹¹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 607.

¹¹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 445.

should expect Jesus to similarly achieve a final, decisive victory that leaves the enemy humiliated, powerless, and defeated. Indeed, this is exactly what is depicted in the book of Revelation, in which Christ is pictured as the victorious conqueror. As William Hendrickson says: “Christ the Rider, upon his white horse, completely triumphs. So complete is his victory over his enemies that... the birds gorge themselves upon the flesh of the wicked.”¹¹⁶ The person of Ehud gives us a glimpse of what Christ will finally accomplish, and the victory of Ehud, in all its gory and unpleasant detail, foreshadows the judgement of all who oppose, oppress, and despise the covenant people of God.

Conclusion

Judg 3:15-22 can be a challenging passage for the modern reader. Why is it so violent? What’s the big deal about being left-handed? Why is it so gross? The contemporary exegete, however, may safely and confidently use this text to teach about the Christian life, the Christian gospel, and the Christian expectation of Christ’s ultimate victory because God is at work in the work of His people. Each element, from Ehud’s dexterity, to the length of his sword, to Eglon’s portliness, to the existence of idols in post-conquest Israel, informs our understanding of the proper translation, meaning, and application of this pericope. God, through the responsible action of Ehud and his own sovereign providence, brought about the deliverance of Israel, and likewise “he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to him.” (Heb 7:25) May His Church always draw near to Him and declare His saving power.

¹¹⁶ William Hendrickson, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 201.

Appendix – The Naue Type II Blade

Figure 1 is a depiction of a Naue Type II blade discovered in Ugarit. It lacks a crossing guard and is a single solid piece. This type of sword would have allowed of a smooth and deep strike like that depicted in Judg 3:21. This blade is a likely approximation of what Ehud's custom blade may have looked like.¹¹⁷

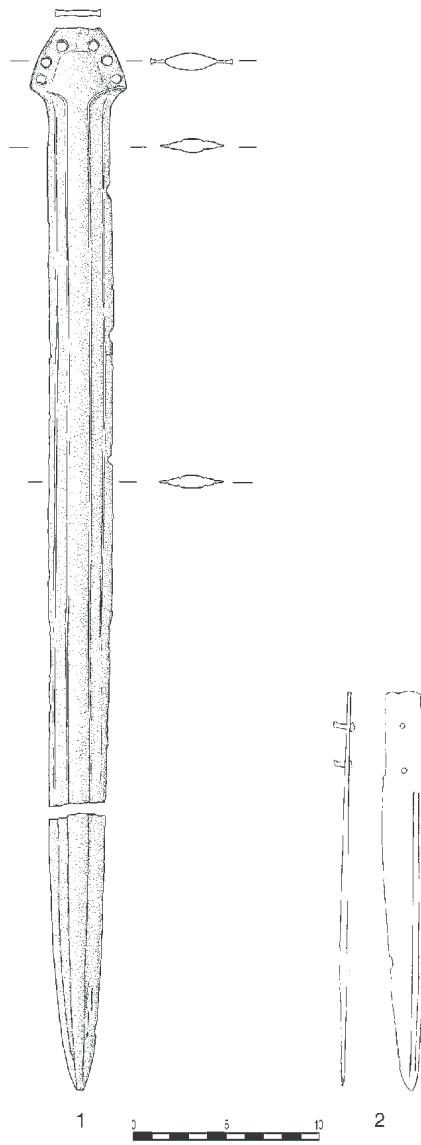


Figure 1¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Way, *Judges and Ruth*, 36

¹¹⁸ R. Jung and Mathias Mehofer, "A sword of Naue II type from Ugarit and the Historical Significance of Italian type Weaponry in the Eastern Mediterranean," *AEA* 8 (2008): 112.

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