
JUDGES 3:1 Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them, even as many as had not known all the wars of Canaan;

An account of the nations that we left to prove Israel, Jdg 3:1-4. How the people provoked the Lord, Jdg 3:5-7. They are delivered into the power of the king of Mesopotamia, by whom they are enslaved eight years, Jdg 3:8. Othniel is raised up as their deliverer; he discomfits the king of Mesopotamia, delivers Israel, and the land enjoys peace for forty years, Jdg 3:9-11. They again rebel, and are delivered into the hand of the king of Moab, by whom they are enslaved eighteen years, Jdg 3:12-14. They are delivered by Ehud, who kills Eglon, king of Moab, and slays ten thousand Moabites, and the land rests fourscore years, vv. 15-30.

Verse 1

Now these are the nations - The nations left to prove the Israelites were the five lordships or satrapies of the Philistines, viz., Gath, Askelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gaza; the Sidonians, the Hivites of Lebanon, Baal-hermon, etc.; with the remains of the Canaanites, viz., the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, and Jebusites. Those who were left to be proved were those Israelites that had not seen all the wars of Canaan.

JUDGES 3:2 only that the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war, at the least such as before knew nothing of it:

Verse 2

That - Israel might know, to teach them war - This was another reason why the Canaanites were left in the land, that the Israelites might not forget military discipline, but habituate themselves to the use of arms, that they might always be able to defend themselves against their foes. Had they been faithful to God, they would have had no need of learning the art of war; but now arms became a sort of necessary substitute for that spiritual strength which had departed from them. Thus Gods in his judgments leaves one iniquitous nation to harass and torment another. Were all to turn to God, men need learn war no more.

JUDGES 3:3 the five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites who lived on Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal Hermon to the entrance of Hamath.

JUDGES 3:4 They were left to test Israel by them, to know whether they would listen to the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by Moses.

Verse 4

To know whether they would hearken - This would be the consequence of the Canaanites being left among them: if they should be faithful to God, their enemies would not be able to enslave them; should they be rebellious, the Lord would abandon them to their foes.

JUDGES 3:5 The children of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites:

JUDGES 3:6 and they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons and served their gods.

Verse 6

And they took their daughters - They formed matrimonial alliances with those proscribed nations, served their idols, and thus became one with them in politics and religion.

JUDGES 3:7 The children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served the Baals and the Asheroth.

Verse 7

Served Baalim and the groves - No groves were ever worshipped, but the deities who were supposed to be resident in them; and in many cases temples and altars were built in groves, and the superstition of consecrating groves and woods to the honor of the deities was a practice very usual with the ancients. Pliny assures us that trees, in old times, served for the temples of the gods. Tacitus reports this custom of the old Germans; Quintus Curtius, of the Indians; and Caesar, and our old writers, mention the same of the Druids in Britain. The Romans were admirers of this way of worship and therefore had their luci or groves in most parts of the city, dedicated to some deity. But it is very probable that the word אֲשֵׁרוֹת asheroth which we translate groves, is a corruption of the word עֲשֵׂתָרוֹת ashtaroth, the moon or Venus, (see on Jdg 2:13 (note)), which only differs in the letters ע ת, from the former. Ashtaroth is read in this place by the Chaldee Targum, the Syriac, the Arabic, and the Vulgate, and by one of Dr. Kennicott's MSS.

JUDGES 3:8 Therefore the LORD's anger was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of Cushan Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Cushan Rishathaim eight years.

Verse 8

Chushan-rishathaim - Kushan, the wicked or impious; and so the word is rendered by the Chaldee Targum, the Syriac, and the Arabic, wherever it occurs in this chapter.

King of Mesopotamia - King of אֲרָם נְהָרַיִם Aram naharayim, "Syria of the two rivers;" translated Mesopotamia by the Septuagint and Vulgate. It was the district situated between the Tigris and Euphrates, called by the Arabian geographers Maverrannaher, "the country beyond the river," it is now called Diarbek. See the note on Act 2:9.

Served Chushan - eight years - He overran their country, and forced them to pay a very heavy tribute.

JUDGES 3:9 When the children of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised up a saviour to the children of Israel, who saved them, even Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.

Verse 9

Raised up - Othniel, the son of Kenaz - This noble Hebrew was of the tribe of Judah, and nephew and son-in-law to Caleb, whose praise stands without abatement in the sacred records. Othniel had already signalized his valor in taking Kirjath-sepher, which appears to have been a very hazardous exploit. By his natural valor, experience in war, and the peculiar influence of the Divine Spirit, he was well qualified to inspire his countrymen with courage, and to lead them successfully against their oppressors.

JUDGES 3:10 The Spirit of the LORD came on him, and he judged Israel; and he went out to war, and the LORD delivered Cushan Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand: and his hand prevailed against Cushan Rishathaim.

Verse 10

His hand prevailed - We are not told or what nature this war was, but it was most decisive; and the consequence was an undisturbed peace of forty years, during the whole life of Othniel. By the Spirit of the Lord coming upon him, the Chaldee understands the spirit of prophecy; others understand the spirit of fortitude and extraordinary courage, as opposed to the spirit of fear or faintness of heart; but as Othniel was judge, and had many offices to fulfill besides that of a general, he had need of the Spirit of God, in the proper sense of the word, to enable him to guide and govern this most refractory and fickle people; and his receiving it for these purposes, shows that the political state of the Jews was still a theocracy. No man attempted to do any thing in that state without the immediate inspiration of God, the pretension to which was always justified by the event.

JUDGES 3:11 The land had rest forty years. Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

JUDGES 3:12 The children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done that which was evil in the sight of the LORD.

Verse 12

The children of Israel did evil - They forgot the Lord and became idolaters, and God made those very people, whom they had imitated in their idolatrous worship, the means of their chastisement.

The Lord strengthened Eglon the king of Moab - The success he had against the Israelites was by the especial appointment and energy of God.

He not only abandoned the Israelites, but strengthened the Moabites against them. Eglon is supposed to have been the immediate successor of Balak. Some great men have borne names which, when reduced to their grammatical meaning, appear very ridiculous: the word עגלון Eglon signifies a little calf!

JUDGES 3:13 He gathered to him the children of Ammon and Amalek; and he went and struck Israel, and they possessed the city of palm trees.

Verse 13

The city of palm trees - This the Targum renders the city of Jericho; but Jericho had been destroyed by Joshua, and certainly was not rebuilt till the reign of Ahab, long after this, 1Kgs 16:34. However, as Jericho is expressly called the city of palm trees, Deu 34:3, the city in question must have been in the vicinity or plain of Jericho, and the king of Moab had seized it as a frontier town contiguous to his own estates. Calmet supposes that the city of palm trees means En-gaddi.

JUDGES 3:14 The children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.

JUDGES 3:15 But when the children of Israel cried to the LORD, the LORD raised them up a saviour, Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a man left-handed. The children of Israel sent tribute by him to Eglon the king of Moab.

Verse 15

Ehud the son of Gera - a man left handed - ימינו יד אטר איש ish itter yad yemino, a man lame in his right hand, and therefore obliged to use his left. The Septuagint render it ανδρα αμφοτεροδεξιον, an ambidexter, a man who could use both hands alike. The Vulgate, qui utraque manu pro dextera utebatur, a man who could use either hand as a right hand, or to whom right and left were equally ready. This is not the sense of the original, but it is the sense in which most interpreters understand it. It is well known that to be an ambidexter was in high repute among the ancients: Hector boasts of it: - Αυταρ εγων εν οιδα μαχας τ,ανδροκτασιας τε· Οιδ' επι δεξια, οιδ' επ' αριστερα νωμησαι βων Αζαλεην, το μοι εστι ταλαυρινον πολεμιζειν.

Iliad, lib. vii., ver. 237. "But am in arms well practiced; many a Greek

Hath bled by me, and I can shift my shield

From right to left; reserving to the last

Force that suffices for severest toil."

Cowper.

Asteropaeus is also represented by Homer as an ambidexter, from which he derives great advantages in fight: - Ὡς φατ' απειλησας· ὁ δ' ανεσχετο διος Αχιλλευσ Πηλιαδα μελινη· ὁ δ' ὀμαρτη δουρασιν αμφις Ἴρωσ Αστεροπαιος, επει περιδεξιος ηε.

Iliad, lib. xxi., ver. 161.

So threatened he. Then raised Achilles high

The Pelian ash: - and his two spears at once

Alike, (a practiced warrior), with both hands

Asteropaeus hurled."

Cowper.

We are informed by Aristotle, that Plato recommended to all soldiers to acquire by study and exercise an equal facility of using both hands. Speaking of Plato, he says: Και την εν τοις πολεμικοισασκεσιν, ὅπως αμφιδεξιοι γινωνται κατα την μελετην, ὡς δεον μ η την μεν χρησιμον ειναι ταιν χερσιν, την δε αχρηστον. - De Repub., lib. ii., cap. 12. "He (Plato) also made a law concerning their warlike exercises, that they should acquire a habit of using both hands alike; as it is not fit that one of the hands should be useful and the other useless." In Jdg 20:16 of this book we have an account of seven hundred men of Benjamin, each of whom was ימינו יד יטא itter yad yemino, lame of his right hand, and yet slinging stones to a hair's breadth without missing: these are generally thought to be ambidexters.

Sent a present unto Eglon - This is generally understood to be the tribute money which the king of Moab had imposed on the Israelites.

JUDGES 3:16 Ehud made him a sword which had two edges, a cubit in length; and he wore it under his clothing on his right thigh.

Verse 16

A dagger which had two edges, of a cubit length - The word **גומד** gommed, which we translate cubit, is of very doubtful signification. As the root seems to signify contracted, it probably means an instrument made for the purpose shorter than usual, and something like the Italian stiletto. The Septuagint translate it by **σπιθαμη**, a span, and most of the versions understand it in the same sense.

Upon his right thigh - Because he was left-handed. Ordinarily the sword is on the left side, that it may be readily drawn out by the right hand; but as Ehud was left-handed, to be convenient his sword must be on the right side.

JUDGES 3:17 He offered the tribute to Eglon king of Moab: now Eglon was a very fat man.

Verse 17

Eglon was a very fat man - The **יש בריא** ish bari of the text is translated by the Septuagint **ανηρ αστείος σφοδρα**, a very beautiful or polite man, and in the Syriac, a very rude man. It probably means what we call lusty or corpulent.

JUDGES 3:18 When he had made an end of offering the tribute, he sent away the people who bore the tribute.

Verse 18

Made an end to offer the present - Presents, tribute, etc., in the eastern countries were offered with very great ceremony; and to make the more parade several persons, ordinarily slaves, sumptuously dressed, and in considerable number, were employed to carry what would not be a burden even to one. This appears to have been the case in the present instance.

JUDGES 3:19 But he himself turned back from the quarries that were by Gilgal, and said, "I have a secret errand to you, king."

The king said, "Keep silence!" All who stood by him went out from him.

Verse 19

He - turned - from the quarries - **פסילים** pesilim. Some of the versions understand this word as meaning idols or graven images, or some spot where the Moabites had a place of idolatrous worship. As **לספ** pasal signifies to cut, hew, or engrave, it may be applied to the images thus cut, or to the place, or quarry whence they were digged: but it is most likely that idols are meant. Some think that trenches are meant, and that pesilim here may mean the boundaries of the two countries: and when Ehud had got thus far, he sent away the people that were with him, under pretense of having a secret message to Eglon, and so got rid of his attendants, in presence of whom he could not have executed his scheme, nor have secured his escape afterwards. But I do not see the evidence of this mode of interpretation.

JUDGES 3:20 Ehud came to him; and he was sitting by himself alone in the cool upper room. Ehud said, "I have a message from God to you." He arose out of his seat.

Verse 20

He was sitting in a summer parlor - Besides the platforms, says Dr. Shaw, which were upon the ancient houses of the East, and which are found there to this day, it is probable that heretofore, as well as at present, most of the great houses had a smaller one annexed, which seldom consisted of more than one or two rooms and a terrace. Others, built as they frequently are above the porch or gateway, have, if we except the ground-floor, all the conveniences belonging to the house, properly so called. There is a door of communication from them into the gallery of the house, kept open or shut at the discretion of the master of the house, besides another door which opens immediately

from a privy stairs down into the porch or street, without giving the least disturbance to the house. In these back houses strangers are usually lodged and entertained; hither the men are wont to retire from the hurry and noise of their families, to be more at leisure for meditation or diversions; and they are often used for wardrobes and magazines. These the Arabs call oleah, which exactly answers to the Hebrew word עלית aliyath found in this place; and without doubt such was the apartment in which Eglon received Ehud, by the privy stairs belonging to which he escaped, after having killed Eglon. The doors of the Eastern buildings are large, and their chambers spacious, conveniences well adapted to those hotter climates; but in the present passage something more seems to be meant; at least there are now other conveniences in the East to give coolness to particular rooms, which are very common. In Egypt the cooling their rooms is effected by openings at the top, which let in the fresh air. Mons. Maillet informs us that their halls are made very large and lofty, with a dome at the top, which towards the north has several open windows, so constructed as to throw the north wind down into the rooms; and by this means, though the country is excessively hot, they can make the coolness of those apartments so great, as often not to be borne without being wrapped in furs. Eglon's was a chamber; and some contrivance to mitigate the heat of it was the more necessary, as he appears to have kept his court at Jericho, Jdg 3:13, Jdg 3:28, where the heat is so excessive as sometimes to prove fatal. See Harmer's Observations.

I have a message from God unto thee - דבר אלהים לי אליך - debar elohim li aleycha, a word of the gods to me, unto thee. It is very likely that the word elohim is used here to signify idols, or the pesilim mentioned above, Jdg 3:19. Ehud, having gone so far as this place of idolatry, might feign he had there been worshipping, and that the pesilim had inspired him with a message for the king; and this was the reason why the king commanded silence, why every man went out, and why he rose from his seat or throne, that he might receive it with the greater respect. This, being an idolater, he would not have done to any message coming from the God of Israel. I have a message from God unto thee is a popular text: many are fond of preaching from it. Now as no man should ever depart from the literal meaning of Scripture in his preaching, we may at once see the absurdity of taking such a text as this; for such preachers, to be consistent, should carry a two-edged dagger of a cubit length on their right thigh, and be ready to thrust it into the bowels of all those they address! This is certainly the literal meaning of the passage, and that it has no other meaning is an incontrovertible truth.

JUDGES 3:21 Ehud put out his left hand, and took the sword from his right thigh, and thrust it into his body:

JUDGES 3:22 and the handle also went in after the blade; and the fat closed on the blade, for he didn't draw the sword out of his body; and it came out behind.

Verse 22

The haft also went in after the blade - As the instrument was very short, and Eglon very corpulent, this might readily take place.

And the dirt came out - This is variously understood: either the contents of the bowels issued through the wound, or he had an evacuation in the natural way through the fright and anguish. The original, פרשדונה parshedonah, occurs only here, and is supposed to be compounded of פרש peresh,

dung, and שדה shadah, to shed, and may be very well applied to the latter circumstance; so the Vulgate understood it: *Statinque per secreta naturae alvi stercora proruperunt.*

JUDGES 3:23 Then Ehud went out onto the porch, and shut the doors of the upper room on him, and locked them.

JUDGES 3:24 Now when he was gone out, his servants came; and they saw, and behold, the doors of the upper room were locked; and they said, "Surely he is covering his feet in the upper room."

Verse 24

He covereth his feet - He has lain down on his sofa in order to sleep; when this was done they dropped their slippers, lifted up their feet, and covered them with their long loose garments. But the versions, in general, seem to understand it as implying a certain natural act.

JUDGES 3:25 They waited until they were ashamed; and behold, he didn't open the doors of the upper room: therefore they took the key, and opened them, and behold, their lord was fallen down dead on the earth.

JUDGES 3:26 Ehud escaped while they waited, and passed beyond the quarries, and escaped to Seirah.

Verse 26

Passed beyond the quarries - Beyond the pesilim, which appear to have been the Moabitish borders, where they had set up those hewn stones as landmarks, or sacred boundary stones.

JUDGES 3:27 When he had come, he blew a trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim; and the children of Israel went down with him from the hill country, and he before them.

JUDGES 3:28 He said to them, "Follow me; for the LORD has delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand." They followed him, and took the fords of the Jordan against the Moabites, and didn't allow any man to pass over.

Verse 28

Took the fords of Jordan - It is very likely that the Moabites, who were on the western side of Jordan, hearing of the death of Eglon, were panic-struck, and endeavored to escape over Jordan at the fords near Jericho, when Ehud blew his trumpet in the mountains of Ephraim, and thus to get into the land of the Moabites, which lay on the east of Jordan; but Ehud and his men, seizing the only pass by which they could make their escape, slew ten thousand of them in their attempt to cross at those fords. What is called here the fords was doubtless the place where the Israelites had passed Jordan when they (under Joshua) took possession of the promised land.

JUDGES 3:29 They struck of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, every lusty man, and every man of valor; and there escaped not a man.

Verse 29

All lusty, and all men of valor - Picked, chosen troops, which Eglon kept among the Israelites to reduce and overawe them.

JUDGES 3:30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. The land had rest eighty years.

Verse 30

The land had rest fourscore years - This is usually reckoned from the deliverance under Othniel, that being a term from which they dated every transaction, as in other cases they dated from the exodus, from the building of Solomon's temple, etc., and as other nations did from particular events: the Romans, from the building of the city; the Mohammedans, from the Hijreh, or flight of Mohammed to Medina; the Christians, from the birth of Christ, etc., etc. But see the preface, and the different chronological schemes there mentioned.

JUDGES 3:31 After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who struck of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also saved Israel.

Verse 31

And after him was Shamgar the son of Anath - Dr. Hales supposes that "Shamgar's administration in the West included Ehud's administration of eighty years in the East; and that, as this administration might have been of some continuance, so this Philistine servitude which is not noticed elsewhere, might have been of some duration; as may be incidentally collected from Deborah's thanksgiving, Jdg 5:6."

Slew - six hundred men with an ox-goad - מלמד הבקר malmad habbakar, the instructor of the oxen. This instrument is differently understood by the versions: the Vulgate has vomere, with the coulter or ploughshare, a dreadful weapon in the hand of a man endued with so much strength; the Septuagint has ἀροτροποδι των βων, with the ploughshare of the oxen; the Chaldee, Syriac, and Arabic, understand it of the goad, as does our translation.

1. That the ox-goad, still used in Palestine, is a sufficiently destructive weapon if used by a strong and skillful hand, is evident enough from the description which Mr. Maundrell gives of this implement, having seen many of them both in Palestine and Syria: "It was observable," says he, "that in ploughing they used goads of an extraordinary size; upon measuring of several I found them about eight feet long, and at the bigger end about six inches in circumference. They were armed at the lesser end with a sharp prickle for driving the oxen, and at the other end with a small spade or

paddle of iron, strong and massy, for cleansing the plough from the clay that encumbers it in working." See his Journey from Aleppo, etc., 7th edit., pp. 110, 111. In the hands of a strong, skillful man, such an instrument must be more dangerous and more fatal than any sword. It is worthy of remark that the ox-goad is represented by Homer to have been used prior to this time in the same way. In the address of Diomed to Glaucus, Iliad. lib. vi., ver. 129, Lycurgus is represented as discomfiting Bacchus and the Bacchanals with this weapon. The siege of Troy, according to the best chronologers, happened within the time of the Israelitish judges. Ουκ αν εγωγε θεοισιν επουρανιοισι μαχοι μ η ν · Ουδε γαρ ουδε Δρυαντος υιος κρατερος Λυκουργος Σευε κατ' ηγαθειον Νυσσηϊον· αι δ' αμα πασαι Θυσθλα χαμαι κατεχευαν, υπ' ανδροφονοιο Λυκουργου Θεινομεναι βουπληγι. "I fight not with the inhabitants of heaven;

That war Lycurgus, son of Dryas, waged,

Nor long survived. - From Nyssa's sacred heights

He drove the nurses of the frantic god,

Thought drowning Bacchus: to the ground they cast

All cast, their leafy wands; while, ruthless, he

Spared not to smite them with his murderous goad."

The meaning of this fable is: Lycurgus, king of Thrace, finding his subjects addicted to drunkenness, proscribed the cultivation of the vine in his dominions, and instituted agriculture in its stead; thus θυσθλα, the thyrsi, were expelled, βουπληγι, by the ox-goad. The account, however, shows that Shamgar was not the only person who used the ox-goad as an offensive weapon. If we translate βουπληξ a cart-whip, the parallel is lost.

2. It appears that Shamgar was merely a laboring man; that the Philistines were making an inroad on the Israelites when the latter were cultivating their fields; that Shamgar and his neighbors successfully resisted them; that they armed themselves with their more portable agricultural instruments; and that Shamgar, either with a ploughshare or an ox-goad, slew six hundred of those marauders.

3. The case of Ehud killing Eglon is a very serious one; and how far he was justified in this action is with all a question of importance, and with not a few a question of difficulty. "Is it right to slay a tyrant?" I, without hesitation, answer, No individual has a right to slay any man, except it be in his own defense, when a person attacks him in order to take away his life. "But may not any of his oppressed subjects put an end to the life of a tyrant?" No. The state alone can judge whether a king is ruling contrary to the laws and constitution of that state; and if that state have provided laws for the punishment of a ruler who is endeavoring to destroy or subvert that constitution, then let him be dealt with according to those laws. But no individual or number of individuals in that state has any right to dispose of the life of the ruler but according to law. To take his life in any other way is no less than murder. It is true God, the author of life and the judge of all men, may commission one man to take away the life of a tyrant. But the pretension to such a commission must be strong, clear, and unequivocal; in short, if a man think he have such a commission, to be safe, he should require the Lord to give him as full an evidence of it as he did to Moses; and when such a person comes to the people, they should require him to give as many proofs of his Divine call as the Hebrews did Moses, before they should credit his pretensions. "But had not Ehud a Divine call?" I cannot tell. If he had, he did not murder Eglon; if he had not, his act, however it succeeded, was a murderous act; and if he had no message from God, (and there is no proof that he had), then he was a most base and

hypocritical assassin. The sacred historian says nothing of his motives nor call; he mentions simply the fact, and leaves it without either observation or comment, and every reader is left to draw his own inference. The life of any ruler can only be at the disposal of the constitution, or that system of rules, laws, and regulations, by which the people he rules should be governed; if he rule not according to these, he is, ipso facto, deposed from his government. If he break the constitution, to the great injury or ruin of his subjects, then he is to be judged by those laws according to which he must have pledged himself to govern. If a king be deposed on any other account, it is rebellion. If his life be taken away by any means but those provided by the constitution, it is murder. No pretended or proved tyranny can justify his being taken off in any other way, or on any other account. And what constitution in the civilized world provides for the death of the supreme magistrate? It is true the good people, as they were called, of England and France, have each under a pretense of law, beheaded their king; and they endeavored to justify their conduct on the ground that those kings had broken the constitution: this being proved, they should have been deposed. But by what law, either of those nations or of the civilized world, were their lives taken away? Let it be remembered that the inflation of the punishment of death, either against or without law, is murder.