

Ehud: Doing Battle with the Flesh

Judges 3:12-30

As we have seen already in our study of the book of Judges, the nation of Israel followed a predictable pattern. They would serve God while they followed the strong leadership of their judges. When a judge died, they had no leader, and they would desert God, and began to live in disobedience to His Law, serving the pagan gods of the Canaanites. When they rebelled, the Lord would strengthen Israel's enemies to oppress them. After a time, Israel would cry out to God and He would raise up a deliverer to defeat Israel's enemies and set them free.

The story of Ehud follow this pattern again. Israel sinned against God and the Lord caused Eglon, the king of Moab, to become strong. Eglon invaded Israel, with the help of the Ammonites and the Amalekites, and together they oppressed Israel for 18 years. When they cried out to God, He raised up a man named Ehud to be their deliverer. Ehud assassinated Eglon and led Israel to victory and freedom.

This story has much to teach us, if we will allow it to. Like Israel, we often follow the same pattern of disobedience, chastisement and restoration. Our problem is not the Moabites, the Ammonites or the Amalekites. Our problem is sin and the flesh.

Eglon is the perfect picture of the flesh. He is power-hungry. He is self-indulgent. He demands tribute. He is fat, and evil. He is full of pride.

In Israel's defeat of Eglon, I see a picture of the battle we must fight every day. Even though Christ has won the war, we are still in the battle. Every one of us has problems with our flesh. Sometimes we win our battles with the flesh; sometimes we lose our battles with the flesh. We are literally in a fight for our very spiritual lives every day. This passage gives us the help we need to fight and win the battle with the flesh.

One preacher called this story, ***How Lefty Killed Hefty***. I have been more direct in our application, ***Doing Battle with the Flesh***.

First we see Israel's problem.

I. ISRAEL'S PROBLEM v. 12-14

12 And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord. So the Lord strengthened Eglon king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord.

13 Then he gathered to himself the people of Ammon and Amalek, went and defeated Israel, and took possession of the City of Palms.

14 So the children of Israel served Eglon king of Moab eighteen years.

These verses describe the horrible oppression Israel suffered because of her rebellion against the Lord. Israel faced three nations because of their rebellion against God. They faced the Moabites, the Ammonites and the Amalekites. All three of these nations were continual problems for Israel, and all three were connected to Israel by blood.

The Amalekites were descended from Esau, Jacob's twin brother. The Moabites and the Ammonites were the offspring of Abraham's nephew Lot and his incestuous relations with his daughters. These nations mostly settled on the east of the Jordan river and to the south.

The Amalekites were the first of the nations that Israel defeated when she came out of Egypt. Through God's help and Moses' outstretched arms, Israel also conquered Ammon and defeated Moab. Now, however, those victories have been reversed.

All three of these pagan, idol-worshipping nations were a continual thorn in the side of Israel. They were constantly attacking, hindering and seeking to enslave the people of Israel. These three nations are a picture of our old, fleshly natures. They demonstrate the power, the passion and the persistence of the flesh.

Just like Israel was repeatedly attacked by these nations, the believer is continually attacked by the flesh. Our flesh has its own desires. It does not like the way of holiness and the way of righteousness.

Don't be deceived, your flesh hates God and everything God stands for. Your flesh will never submit to the Word of God. It must be forced into submission by a strong show of force. As Paul cried out in Romans 7, **"O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!"**

These three nations joined forces and came against Israel. These pagan armies did not come by for a friendly picnic; they came to destroy Israel. Israel was in a fight for its very existence.

The battle we wake up to every day is just as serious! We are in a fight for our very spiritual lives every day we live. Paul describes this battle for us in Galatians 5:17, **"For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish."**

We are in a war! The Christian life is not a play ground, it is a battle ground! We need to suit up for war every day by putting on the whole armor of God, by praying and reading the Word, and by taking a stand that refuses to yield to sin in any form! It isn't easy, but it is His command for us!

Eglon established his headquarters in **"the city of palms"**. This is another name for the city of Jericho (Deut. 34:3). Jericho was the first city conquered by Israel when they entered the Promised Land. Jericho represented all the victories that God would give them in the future. To see their oppressors set up their headquarters in the very place where they once had enjoyed great military and spiritual victory must have been hard for Israel to swallow.

Such is the power of the flesh! Just what you think you have achieved victory in an area of your life, and just what you think that problem with that sin is settled forever, here comes the flesh. It will do everything in its power to undermine your victories and take back any ground you have won. The flesh is relentless.

Because Israel failed to honor the will of God in their walk day by day, they became the servants of Eglon verse 14. Israel had been redeemed to be the servants of Jehovah God. Now, because of their sins, they have become the servants of pagan kings. For eighteen years Israel served her enemies. For eighteen years the ungodly ruled in the land and Israel paid them tribute.

When we give in to the power of the flesh it will enslave us and lead us away from the Lord. But listen, this is not what God saved us for. He did not save us so that we would remain the slaves of sin. He saved us to be free. He saved us to serve Him and Him alone!

But, if you allow the flesh to have its way in your life, you will become its slave. It will squeeze the very spiritual life right out of you. Have you let the flesh take over? Do you find yourself once again enslaved to things that you thought God delivered you from years ago?

Well, that was I. **Israel's Problem.** Next we see

II. ISRAEL'S DELIVERER v. 15-26

15 But when the children of Israel cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer for them: Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man. By him the children of Israel sent tribute to Eglon king of Moab.

When Israel finally got tired of the servitude, she called on the Lord. And the Lord raised up a deliverer for them Ehud.

Who was Ehud? He was from the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin's allotment of land included the area around Jericho. So they probably suffered the most under Eglon's reign.

Ehud was "**a left-handed man**". It is kind of ironic that in the tribe of Benjamin (which means son-of-my-right-hand) there were many who were left handed (Judges 20:16). In this verse, when the Bible says that he was "**a left-handed man**", it literally means that he was "**bound in the right hand.**" But Ehud took what many would see as a liability and turned it into an asset.

Let me say right here what everyone already knows. We all have our problems! Moses was tongued tied. David was young. Paul had a thorn in the flesh. We all have some issue or another that we think hinders us from being all the Lord would have us to be. Well, I have one question for you: Did God not know about your issues when He saved you? Of course He did, but He saved you anyway. ***He did not save you so you could fret over what you couldn't do; He saved you so He could enable you to do what only He can do.***

We need to stop making excuses about why we can't do this or that and get busy doing something for Him!

Let's see what Ehud was able to do because of his disability.

16 Now Ehud made himself a dagger (it was double-edged and a cubit in length) and fastened it under his clothes on his right thigh.

17 So he brought the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. (Now Eglon was a very fat man.)

18 And when he had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who had carried the tribute.

19 But he himself turned back from the stone images that were at Gilgal, and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." He said, "Keep silence!" And all who attended him went out from him.

Probably every year, the people of Israel were required to pay tribute to Eglon. So, they sent their gift to Eglon with a delegation led by Ehud. Ehud planned ahead. He fashioned a double-edged dagger some 14 inches long. He strapped this sword to his right thigh, under his cloak, and went to take the tribute money to the king. His plan is to get Eglon alone, and assassinate the king. It was a daring plan!

After delivering the tribute to Eglon, the delegation departed. After they had gone a short distance, Ehud came back and told Eglon that he had a secret message for him. The king, supposing that he was about to hear some great secret, tells Ehud to keep silent until they are alone. Eglon sends everyone else out of the room. Ehud executes his plan.

20 And Ehud came to him (now he was sitting upstairs in his cool private chamber). Then Ehud said, "I have a message from God for you." So he arose from his seat.

21 Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly.

22 Even the hilt went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the dagger out of his belly; and his entrails came out.

23 Then Ehud went out through the porch and shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them.

24 When he had gone out, Eglon's servants came to look, and to their surprise, the doors of the upper room were locked. So they said, "He is probably attending to his needs in the cool chamber."

25 So they waited till they were embarrassed, and still he had not opened the doors of the upper room. Therefore they took the key and opened them. And there was their master, fallen dead on the floor.

26 But Ehud had escaped while they delayed, and passed beyond the stone images and escaped to Seirah.

So when Ehud gets Eglon alone, he tells the king that he has a message from God. When Eglon stands up to hear this message, Ehud reaches under his cloak, draws the dagger and thrusts it through Eglon's body.

Now, things get pretty gruesome from here on. Eglon was so fat, it seems, and Ehud thrusts the sword so deep into his belly, that the sword was swallowed up by the fat so that neither Eglon nor Ehud could have withdrawn it again. Then one of two things happened here. Either the sword itself came out of Eglon's back; that is, thrust so far and deep that the tip came out of Eglon's back, or Eglon lost control of his bowels as the sword went into his stomach. In either case, the scene is truly gruesome.

Of course, no one ever said the struggle against the flesh would be pretty. Battling with sin and the flesh sometimes gets ugly.

Following this act, Ehud locks the doors to the rooftop room where they are and he makes his escape. Eglon's servants find the doors locked and think the king is in the restroom, which is what the phrase "**probably attending to his needs**," in verse 24 means. The locked door and the odor from the chamber convince the servants that the king is on the throne, so to speak.

They wait until they are literally embarrassed, verse 25. Then they retrieve a key and enter the chamber and find the king dead upon the floor. By this time, Ehud is long gone.

I realize that some of that was probably more information than you wanted in a Sunday sermon, but those details, while they are disgusting, plainly illustrate the nature of the fight we find ourselves in every day. If we are going to enjoy victory over this flesh, we

are going to have to go to battle with it. We are going to have to get close to it and deal it a death blow. It is going to be gritty, dirt work. It isn't for the squeamish, but it is the only way to enjoy victory.

Jesus described it this way, Mark 9:43, **"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched."**

No step is too great. No price is too high. We must take whatever steps are necessary to see the flesh defeated. If we don't we will remain its servant as long as we live!

But Israel has victory, and so can we

III. ISRAEL'S VICTORY v. 27-30

27 And it happened, when he arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the mountains of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mountains; and he led them.

28 Then he said to them, "Follow me, for the Lord has delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand." So they went down after him, seized the fords of the Jordan leading to Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross over.

29 And at that time they killed about ten thousand men of Moab, all stout men of valor; not a man escaped.

30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for eighty years.

When Ehud returned from killing Eglon, He sounded a ram's horn. God had heard Israel's prayers and had raised up a deliverer. Ehud had taken the first step toward giving them victory over their enemies. He had severed the head of the serpent, they needed to destroy the body. The test now was to see whether they would follow God's man or not. They did and they achieved a great victory.

Israel cut off the avenues of escape and the means whereby reinforcements could get in. Then, they killed about 10,000 men. The men they killed were **"all stout men of valor"**. Regardless of their power and military ability, they were defeated by Israel because God gave them the victory!

"...not a man escaped". Israel did not back off until every last one of the Moabites, the Ammonites and the Amalekites in their country had been put to the sword. It was a total victory over the enemy.

Israel's victory has a lesson or two to teach us about our own battles with sin and the flesh.

- God has given us everything we need to enable us to walk in spiritual victory. He has given us the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Hebrews 4:12 says, **"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart."** If we fail to yield to Him and walk in His will, we can never have victory. But, if we will follow Him, humbly and faithfully, He can and will keep us from the bondage of the flesh!

- We need not fear the size or the power of our enemies. We are to fight them with everything God has given us. We are to cut off every avenue of escape and every place

where the enemy might send reinforcements. We are to fight until every last ounce of the enemy's strength is gone. We are to fight until the day He calls us home to glory!

· We are not to tolerate even the tiniest bit of the flesh life within us. Every vestige of the flesh must be put to death. We are to live every day, "***hating even the garment spotted by the flesh,***" **Jude 1:23.**)

We all have problems with the flesh. It is overindulged, self-assured, and out of control. This message is a call for us to take the battle to the flesh. It does not have to carry the day. It does not have to win the victory over us. It does not have to claim the victory in our lives. You can be free!

We must finally get to the point in our lives where we begin to believe in the greatness of God, not the greatness of our enemy. By his Spirit we begin the process of seeing the God who is trustworthy meet our needs and break the yoke we couldn't break ourselves. The minute that begins to happen, we realize that much of what we feared was foolish, that we have lived defeated lives for no good reason. "[Much] greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world." (1 John 4:4.) "Resist the devil," we're told, "and he will flee from you." (James 4:7.)

We are all left-handed in one way or another. But, like Ehud, we can walk in victory. We need to take the Word of God, our dagger, hide it away in our hearts as Psalm 119:11 says, "**Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.**" Take God's word and assassinate the flesh in a sneak attack.

You don't have to be a victim. You can be a victor! You can be a victor over the flesh! If the Lord has touch an area in your life that needs work, this is the place to bring that need!