

THE LEFT-HANDED ASSASSIN

JUDGES 3:12-30

JUDGES #3 - EHUD

About 18 destroyers were moving towards the battleships very slowly. The commander of the battleship squadron smiled smugly. This was too easy. "Destroy them" was the command given. No sooner had the command been given and the battleship guns manned then the destroyers began to disappear from the horizon. "What is going on here?" the battleship commander demanded. "It looks like smoke, billows of smoke being emitted from the destroyers" came the reply. The destroyers were completely lost amid the smokescreen until the smoke reached just 100 yards from the battleships. Then, all of a sudden, the destroyers emerged from the smokescreen. There was no way for the battleships to evade the torpedoes. A torpedo slammed into the side of the U.S.S. Texas, then two more struck the U.S.S. Mississippi. The flagship New Mexico was struck and crippled. Only the U.S.S. Idaho was spared, and that only because of her position behind the other ships. It would have been a complete and dominant victory.

But there was no victory for the enemy because there was no enemy involved. You see, these U.S. Naval ships had been engaged in friendly war games. The squadron of destroyers was also a part of our own naval fleet. This was a peace time exercise in the spring of 1921. But there had been great loss of face. For there had always been a rivalry between the destroyers and the battleships. And now, for the time being at least, the destroyers reigned

supreme.

Commander Bill who had been put in charge of the destroyers was the hero. It was his innovative smokescreen strategy that had won a total victory. But not everybody was as elated as the sailors on the destroyer ships. For Commander Bill had done such a good job, he had gotten so close to the battleships, that the dummy torpedoes that were weakened for use in the war games, had still done tremendous damage to the battleships. A million and a half dollars worth of damage in a minute and a half.

Commander Bill was severely reprimanded after that peace time exercise. He was even threatened with a court-marshal. But when the real thing came around, when our country entered World War 2 in Naval combat with Japan, Bill's ingenuity was remembered. And his technique was used in real conflict. And William Fredrick Halsey, Bo Halsey, was made the Admiral over the entire South Pacific fleet so that our country could have its best opportunity to win control of the Pacific Ocean in World War 2.

We have a saying - "All's fair in love and war." It is a commonly recognized fact that deception is part of the battle plan when engaging with the enemy. In fact, the main object of fighting it to deceive the enemy into thinking that you are doing one thing while executing another gaining dominance with the element of surprise, and thereby, winning the battle.

The second major judge, a man by the name of Ehud, is the most criticized of all of the judges. He is criticized because the Scriptures don't testify to usual spirituality on his part. For instance, the Bible does not say that the Spirit of

the Lord ever came upon Ehud as it said of Othniel. But mostly, Ehud is criticized for the deception that he used in his deliverance of the Israelites from the oppressive hand of Eglon, king of the Moabites. But we must remind ourselves that arguments from silence - that is what the Bible doesn't say - are the weakest of all. And deception is an integral part of warfare. And while Ehud might not be presented as the most godly example in all of the Bible, he is included as one of the 6 major judges, and there are lessons that we can learn from him.

Now you will remember the cycle of the Judges that is repeated many times throughout the book of Judges for it is most important to remember this for the understanding of the book as a whole.

The major characteristic of the age is summed up in the last verse of Judges where it says, "In those days, Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." Jud. 21:25. In other words, the nation of Israel came to the place during this period of 300 or so years between the conquest of Joshua and the Kingdom Period of Saul and David, when there was a complete breakdown in the authority structure. There was no general recognition of authority. Law and Order fell apart. All structure of society disintegrated. And the result was relativistic thinking. Everyone did as he saw fit. Everyone was a law unto himself. Everyone did what was in his own best interest. Everyone determined truth for himself or herself.

For there was a cycle that the nation fell into time and time again during this period of the Judges.

1. First, the people would stray away from following after the law of God. The prevailing new age philosophy of the day would convince people that there is no one certain path for truth - everyone has their own truth. Everyone should do what they think is right in their own eyes. And so people would. They would follow after false gods, or would indulge in all kinds of immorality, or would pursue all kinds of hedonistic pleasures.

2. And the result of their disobedience was the weakening of their social structure. Family units were torn apart, personal character was corrupted, law and order disintegrated. And what would happen every time was that some other force would take advantage of their weakened social structure. Another nation would come in and conquer them. And then the oppression would become more and more severe and restricting.

3. Finally, when things got so bad that it appeared that society was going to bust apart at its seams, the Israelites would cry out to God for deliverance. They would confess their sins. They would ask for God's help. They would promise to reform their ways and do what is right. And every time, God listened to their pleas for help. Every time, God answered their prayers.

4. Now the manner in which God answered their prayers in these days was in the form of a Judge. The Hebrew word, Shaphat, literally meant one who made a decision between 2 or more possible alternatives. The judge was one who rendered a verdict or made a decision. In a day when everyone was making their own decisions and judgments, when things got so bad that this kind of anarchy was just intolerable, God would raise up a person who would then

bring order and structure to society. His or her word would be the law for the time of his or her life. But there was an added dimension to the ministry of the Judge that goes beyond the normal meaning of the word. For in each case, there was also the necessity of some military deliverance as well. For it was the oppression of the enemy that always brought the Israelites to the place of crying out for help. So before there could be structure restored to society, there was the necessity of a military deliverance. So God gave to these Judges the ability to muster an army and lead the Israelites in throwing off the yoke of their enemy. It was after the enemy nation had been subdued that the judge would then settle in to reform society and there would be a period of peace and tranquility in Israel once again. There are 12 individuals who are called Shaphat in the book of Judges. If you include Eli and Samuel who are also called Judges in 1 Samuel, the total number of judges in the Bible is 14. Of the Shaphat in the book of Judges, 6 are normally referred to as major judges and 6 are called minor judges. The minor judges only have a verse or two devoted to them without many details given about their life or deliverance.

Othniel was the first major judge whom we looked at last week.

Now this week we come to Ehud.

NOTICE THIS INTERESTING STORY AS I READ IT FOR YOU - READ JUDGES 3:12-30.

JDG 3:12 Once again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and because they did this evil the LORD gave Eglon king of Moab power over Israel. ¹³ Getting the Ammonites and Amalekites to join him, Eglon came and

attacked Israel, and they took possession of the City of Palms. ¹⁴ The Israelites were subject to Eglon king of Moab for eighteen years.

JDG 3:15 Again the Israelites cried out to the LORD, and he gave them a deliverer--Ehud, a left-handed man, the son of Gera the Benjamite. The Israelites sent him with tribute to Eglon king of Moab. ¹⁶ Now Ehud had made a double-edged sword about a foot and a half long, which he strapped to his right thigh under his clothing. ¹⁷ He presented the tribute to Eglon king of Moab, who was a very fat man. ¹⁸ After Ehud had presented the tribute, he sent on their way the men who had carried it. ¹⁹ At the idols near Gilgal he himself turned back and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king."

The king said, "Quiet!" And all his attendants left him.

JDG 3:20 Ehud then approached him while he was sitting alone in the upper room of his summer palace and said, "I have a message from God for you." As the king rose from his seat, ²¹ Ehud reached with his left hand, drew the sword from his right thigh and plunged it into the king's belly. ²² Even the handle sank in after the blade, which came out his back. Ehud did not pull the sword out, and the fat closed in over it. ²³ Then Ehud went out to the porch; he shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them.

JDG 3:24 After he had gone, the servants came and found the doors of the upper room locked. They said, "He must be relieving himself in the inner room of the house." ²⁵ They waited to the point of embarrassment, but when he did not open the doors of the room, they took a key and unlocked them. There they saw their lord fallen to the floor, dead.

JDG 3:26 While they waited, Ehud got away. He passed by the idols and escaped to Seirah. ²⁷ When he arrived there, he blew a trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went down with him from the hills, with him leading them.

JDG 3:28 "Follow me," he ordered, "for the LORD has given Moab, your enemy, into your hands." So they followed him down and, taking possession of the fords of the Jordan that led to Moab, they allowed no one to cross over. ²⁹ At that time they struck down about ten thousand Moabites, all vigorous and

strong; not a man escaped. ³⁰ That day Moab was made subject to Israel, and the land had peace for eighty years.

WHAT ARE SOME LESSONS THAT WE CAN LEARN FROM EHUD'S EXAMPLE? LET'S LOOK AT 3 OF THEM TOGETHER THIS EVENING.

1. First, Ehud was a man who had a plan.

It is obvious from the story that Ehud had a plan that he had carefully thought through.

*The knife that he made is evidence of the fact that Ehud had a plan. An 18 inch , double-edged knife was not the normal weapon of his time. It would have had to be designed and made by Ehud himself. But it was perfect for what Ehud intended, for it was large enough to do the job and small enough so that it could be concealed easily.

*The pattern of going in with the tribute first so that any suspicion would be removed is evidence of the fact that Ehud had a plan. If there were to be any problem, the problem would naturally occur before the money exchanged hands. If the nation under control were to have any thoughts of revolt, the first thing that they would obviously do is refuse to pay the tribute. Ehud paying the tribute on time would have the natural result of the Moabites relaxing their security. It would have also given Ehud the opportunity to scout out the palace, noting where the entrances and exits were.

*Ehud was a man with a plan. And the result was progress and deliverance for the people of God.

*We often hear the phrase - To fail to plan is to plan to fail. There is a great deal of truth in that statement. Most people do not fail because of lack of good intentions. Most people have a desire to do what is right. But many people fail to put their good intentions into a plan. Their good intentions, then, do not have any chance to succeed - because there is no plan to implement them.

*I have never yet met a Christian who didn't want to grow in the Lord and become more mature as a believer. Just as any child has a natural desire to please his or her parent, so every child of God has a natural desire to bring joy to the heart of God. But when you ask many Christians what their plan for spiritual growth is, you often get a blank stare. No wonder there is not the spiritual growth that is desired.

*Do you want to grow in your knowledge of God? Then what is your plan to read and study God's word?

*Do you want to grow in your relationship with God? then what is your plan to spend time with God in prayer and learn more about prayer?

*Do you want to more effectively share your faith with others? Then what is your plan to witness for the Lord.

Many times we hesitate in planning because we aren't confident that our plan is a worthy one. But we must remember that while one plan can be better than another plan, any plan is usually better than no plan. For at least a poor plan will get us moving in a direction of need.

*Ehud was a man with a plan. It frankly appeared to be somewhat of a

hair-brained plan. To march into the enemy's stronghold and assassinate the king wouldn't normally be considered to be a very bright plan. But Ehud was able to initiate deliverance for his people because of his plan. While every other Israelite was complaining about the oppression of the Moabites, Ehud was forming a plan to do something about it.

2. Second, note with me that Ehud was willing to stand all alone. He had the courage to risk even his own life to deliver God's people.

Now we don't know a great deal about Ehud. We know that he was a Benjaminite. Now this is important to note because the central city that the Moabites had taken possession of according to verse 13 was the City of Palms or Jericho which was in the tribe of Benjamin. So we can see that Ehud would have had a strong, emotional motivation to do something about this oppression for it mainly affected his native area. Isn't it a sad commentary that the city of Jericho which had just a few generations before been the symbol of God's power and strength being the first of the cities to fall as the very walls came tumbling down now had become the center of operations for a foreign oppression power.

But we don't know anything else about Ehud's background or family except for his father's name - Gera. We can surmise something though from the customs of the time. When one nation subjected another to tribute as Moab had done to the Israelites, the general practice was for the oppressing nation to have a recognized leader to deliver the tribute. As Leon Wood stated in his commentary, "The king who imposed the tribute was made to feel more

important when a leader was forced to humble himself in bringing the tribute personally." The fact that Ehud was so easily able to gain a private audience with King Eglon also indicates his influential position. So the evidence points to the fact that Ehud was a man of influence, a distinguished man in the Benjaminite community.

It is likely that Ehud and others had discussed this Moabite oppression for some time. The Moabites had dominated the Israelites for 18 years according to verse 14. There had likely been many possible plans that had been discussed for deliverance. But when push came to shove, everyone else had backed out. So Ehud, this man who had a great deal to lose being a man of influence, decided that he would tackle the problem by himself and stand alone.

It takes courage to stand alone. It especially takes courage to stand alone in a day when the world seems to be falling apart. It takes courage to risk it all for what one believes to be the right thing to do. But these are the types of people that change the course of human history.

Our country was built by courageous people who were willing to stand alone. The pilgrims that sailed to our country on the Mayflower in 1620 were those who were willing to stand for their convictions against a majority who were wrong. 102 of them left Plymouth, England on September 16, even though it was not the season to make such a trip. For 67 days, they all stayed in the heart of the ship. The sea was stormy almost the entire way, and many were sea sick from the first day on. Mainly because of the weather, they had to stay below deck, without any heat, with the stench of their own vomit and

waste. Any attempt to get light or ventilation by opening the hatch usually brought a rush of frigid salt water. For over 2 months that must have seemed like an eternity these courageous pilgrims endured without knowing if they would ever make it to land. But all 102 of them did make it. And they helped to forge a great nation out of a wilderness. They brought order out of chaos, and we enjoy the finest lifestyle in the world now partially because of their sacrifices.

Now as we are living in a time when the threads seem to be unraveling, there is a need for men and women, boys and girls who know the Lord to stand firm for Biblical convictions, even if they have to stand alone. And if you think that one person standing alone can't make a difference, look at Ehud. A nation was delivered because of his willingness to risk all that he had to combat the enemies of God. And so our nation will be impacted if those who know the name of Christ stand courageously to do what is right in a world where everything seems to be wrong.

3. And finally, Ehud was a man who was used by God to deliver his people. The words are beautiful in their simplicity in verse 15. "Again the Israelites cried out to the Lord, and he gave them a deliverer - Ehud."

Ehud was not only a man with a plan, and he was not only a courageous person who was willing to stand alone, but he was also a man of action - he executed his plan. And this allowed God to use Ehud to bring 80 years of peace to his people.

Until the 1988 edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, you could take the

volume S and look up the Salem Church Dam. You would read about a wonderful structure located near Fredricksburg, Virginia, on the Rappahannock River. You could marvel at the 194 feet high dam which was 8,850 feet long. The only problem was that the dam existed only in the pages of the Encyclopedia, not in reality. For the dam was planned by the Army Corps of Engineers in 1944, but it was never built. An encyclopedia editor came across the plans, assumed that the dam would be built, and wrote up an article for the Encyclopedia. For some 40 years people read all about the dam, students wrote articles on the dam, but the dam never was built. Finally, in 1988, somebody realized the oversight and the Salem Church Dam was deleted from further editions.

It is important to plan. Well-designed plans are a beautiful thing. And time spent in planning is valuable, for it can save countless hours in the long run.

But we have to do something about the plans in order to accomplish anything. Plans in themselves, while absolutely necessary, don't accomplish anything. It is only as a plan is executed that it has the capacity to change the course of our own personal lives and the lives of others. Just as the flow of a river remains unchanged by detailed plans sitting on the desk of an Army Corps Engineer, so the direction of our life will remain unaltered unless we have a plan, have the courage to stand alone if need be, and actually come to the place where we execute that plan.

*What does God want you to do in life? What is His purpose for your

life?

*How do you plan to do what God wants you to do in life?

*Are you executing that plan? Are you moving in the direction that God wants you to move in life?

*If you are, then you are enjoying great fulfillment as you are accomplishing what God has created you to do. If you aren't, then you are probably quite frustrated and dissatisfied with life.

*Ehud was a man with a plan. And the results of his life were peace and prosperity for a whole nation for 80 years.