

Ehud

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. Then he gathered to himself the people of Ammon and Amalek, went and defeated Israel, and took possession of the City of Palms. So the children of Israel served Eglon king of Moab eighteen years.

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. 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. So he brought the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. (Now Eglon *was* a very fat man.) And when he had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who had carried the tribute. 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.

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. Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly. 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. Then Ehud went out through the porch and shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them. 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." 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. But Ehud had escaped while they delayed, and passed beyond the stone images and escaped to Seirah.

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. 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. And at that time they killed about ten thousand men of Moab, all stout men of valour; not a man escaped. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for eighty years. Jos 3:12-30

A picture of the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ

In many Old Testament forms, whether they be types, symbols, prophecies or illustrative history, the essential element is the representation of some aspect of the life, work and offices of the Lord. In prophecy there is usually an immediate fulfilment in history affecting Israel, a greater spiritual fulfilment concerning the Lord and often an element which speaks of those in Christ, the church. This is also true of the types: they have an immediate purpose (e.g. the worship in the Tabernacle); they are a picture of Christ (as the dwelling place of God, Immanuel) and as a representation of various aspects of spiritual life (e.g. fellowship with God in the Spirit).

This story of the courage and leadership of Ehud is a case in point. Its primary function is to explain a period of Israel's history where a deliverer raised up by God brought peace to the captivated nation for two generations. Its larger symbolism is the representation of the

victory of Jesus Christ, the man sent by God who defeats his enemy with the sword of his mouth, i.e. his authoritative word (Rev 1:16. 19:15), and then reigns over his freed people.

However, here I want to primarily concentrate on how this story describes the spiritual life of believers. In doing so I want to affirm important truths about walking in grace but also to show how to find deeper truth in seemingly ordinary historical narratives. The key to doing this sensibly is to first establish the overall point; here it is the story of a man, raised up by God, who strikes at his enemy and brings deliverance from oppression with a sword. This synopsis tells you most of what you need to know; the rest can be extrapolated from it. Next you examine details by asking questions: what does his name mean, who are his enemies, where do they come from, what did he do, what was the result? And so on.

So here is an examination of the story of Ehud.

A picture of the victory of the new nature

Who was Eglon?

Eglon (whose name means ‘bullock’ or ‘calf’) was a king of one of the Moabite tribes. He entered into an alliance with Ammon and Amalek to overrun the trans-Jordanic region and, crossing the Jordan, seized the rebuilt Jericho which he made his capital. Thus he subdued Israel for 18 years extracting from it an annual tribute. Being at ease and slothful in his pride he became a very fat man.

What does this typify?

First he was a Moabite, one of the nations that afflicted Israel. Moab was the eldest son of Lot of incestuous birth and thus Moab was a kinsman to Israel. Moab the country was situated on the east of the Jordan river and was the place (on Mt. Nebo) where Moses saw the Promised Land before he died (Deut 34:5-6).

Moab generally is a type of those who afflict the Lord’s people from within. Moab is not like the indigenous Canaanite tribes that represent attacks from the enemy outside, but persecution from those who are affiliated to us in some way. The Canaanite tribes represent the harassing of the Lord’s people by external enemies and their historical purpose was to teach Israel how to learn war (Jud 3:1-4), or in type, to teach believers how to do spiritual warfare and live by faith.

The tribute in Hebrew is *mincha*, which is the word used in the law for the offerings that were presented to God. Eglon had so overcome Israel that the gifts which were due to God were being presented to Israel’s enemy. Not only that, this enemy was one that initially God had forbidden Israel to attack due to the ancestral relationship.

Eglon, meaning bullock, was like a fatted calf given over to sacrifice by the knife to satisfy God’s justice. His death is also shameful in that the text describes his excrement coming out as a result of the knife wound, either from the site of the wound but more likely from the usual place through shock (‘entrails’ is literally ‘excrement’). He would have been found by his servants in a pitiful state, utterly humiliated and dead.

Eglon’s alliance

Was with Ammon and Amalek; who are these people?

Ammon was a tribe descended from the other son of Lot (Gen 19:38) and so this was a most natural allegiance. Amalek was the founder of an Idumaeen tribe (i.e. an Edomite

tribe, not the Amalekites who were a nomadic race that migrated from the Persian Gulf; their kings were called ‘Agag’) and was the grandson of Esau. His mother was a Horite whose territory the descendants of Esau seized.

Now Esau is a type of the old nature, the enemy of Jacob and in general Eglon stands as a picture of the old nature in alliance with other forces bent on subjugating us. Moab and Ammon are types of the enemy from within, or fleshly temptations, and Amalek of the old nature. Together they speak of the forces raging against the believer seeking his captivity to their will.

This whole story is, therefore, a picture of how to deal with the old nature and overcome it.

The 18 year servitude

18 is composed of 9×2 . Two is the number of witness while nine represents judgment.

Nine has similarities to the number six (= man) being the sum of its factors ($3 \times 3 = 9$; $3 + 3 = 6$). Some commentators find multiples of the number nine in the verses and words in the record of the judgment of Sodom (Gen 19:4-29). There were also 27 sieges of Jerusalem from the siege by Judah of the Jebusites (Jud 1:8) to the siege in 1244 (9×3 , i.e. divine judgment). When God speaks of judgment in Hag 1:11, there are nine sub-divisions. The Greek root word for judgment (*dike*) has nine cognate words. Many words connected with judgment occur 9 times (e.g. bottomless pit, lightning, ungodly). As 10 is ordinal perfection and speaks of God’s completeness, the fulness of God’s decree, so nine is falling short of the fulness.

Now whatever we make of this, and whatever importance we may believe in this sort of detail or not, there is at least an indication that 9 represents judgment and therefore 18 is the witness of this judgment. This perfectly accords with the subjugation of Israel by Moab which was the result of disobeying God. The servitude under Eglon was a punishment for Israel forsaking God’s will. Notice that the former servitude lasted only eight years (Jud 3:8), but this one eighteen. In divine chastisement for our sins if early troubles do not bring our repentance, God will send greater ones.

What is the city of palms?

This is Jericho (Deut 34:3; Jud 1:16, 3:13). Now shouldn’t Eglon have been affected by Joshua’s curse?

Then Joshua charged *them* at that time, saying, ‘Cursed *be* the man before the LORD who rises up and builds this city Jericho; he shall lay its foundation with his firstborn, and with his youngest he shall set up its gates.’ Jos 6:26

This was actually fulfilled by Hiel the Bethelite, who rebuilt this city in the times of Ahab, five hundred years later (1 Kg 16:34). The reason for this is that the curse was for the man who rebuilt Jericho as a fortified city. The Hebrew language strongly implies this and in any case it is clear that Jericho was meant to be occupied with houses by Israel, but not to possess a wall and city gates.¹ Joshua allotted the town to the Benjamites (Jos 18:21; Jud

¹ The word “buildeth,” however, does not refer to the erection of houses upon the site of the town that had been burnt to ashes, but to the restoration of the town as a fortification, the word *בנה* being frequently used to denote the fortification of a town (e.g., 1Ki 15:17; 2Ch 11:6; 2Ch 14:5-6). This is evident in general from the fact that a town is not founded by the erection of a number of houses upon one spot, but by the joining of these houses together into an enclosed whole by means of a surrounding wall, but more particularly from the last words of the verse, in which *בנה* is explained as *ייסדנה* (lay the foundation thereof) and *יצים דלתיה* (set up the gates of it). Setting up the gates of a town is not setting up doors to the houses, but erecting town-gates,

3:13; 2 Sam 10:5). Eglon took possession of this Benjamite town and used it as a royal capital, but it was not fortified with walls.

The significance of Jericho being taken captive by Eglon and made into his capital is that it was the scene of Israel's first victory over the Canaanites. Is it not true that when the old nature arises and defeats us that he destroys that which we had first tasted of victory in our lives? If we do not continually put off the old nature we quickly lose those things we gained by early victories.

Who was Ehud?

His name means 'praise' (though some say it mean 'union') and this gives us a clue as to what he represents. He was a descendant of Benjamin, who was the younger child of Jacob by Rachel and thus was loved, especially as Rachel died in giving birth to him. So Benjamin stands for something beloved. The tribe was also closely allied to Judah and these two became all that was left of Israel after the captivity of the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians.

Jericho lies within the tribal allotments of Benjamin and it was therefore likely that this tribe suffered more from oppression than the others on the west bank of the Jordan. This tribe was the smallest and after the war with Israel (over the wickedness of Gibeah) was also the weakest, at one point being down to 600 armed men. Yet out of this weakness God raises up a deliverer, or saviour, the second of the judges of Israel. This is indicative of grace – divine strength out of human weakness.

Ehud was the man raised up by God as a champion for the salvation of Israel in response to the repentant cries of his people. He was also a left-handed man, a maverick, someone who did not follow the course adopted by the many. Ehud is thus a picture of the new man, the elect believer, the one who praises God and defeats the enemy. 'Benjamin' means 'son of the right hand', though many of them were left-handed. Ehud, as the deliverer raised up by God, becomes God's right hand man even though he was left-handed – again this signifies grace. It was God's right hand that gained the victory (Ps 44:3).

What did Ehud do?

He carried out God's will

He tells Eglon that he has a message from God, and indeed he had – it was his death. Thus God sanctions this assassination as a judgment for his oppression, which is not ordinarily permitted. The basis of Ehud's actions is God's word; he was fulfilling God's will. The fundamental basis for the defeat of the enemy must be God's word; our success in defeating the old nature is acting by faith upon God's word. Notice also that a message from God may be a judgment as well as a blessing.

He made a sword

Ehud first got himself a weapon. Presumably armour had been confiscated when Israel was captivated and most of Israel's warriors decimated; also the making of iron weapons would have been forbidden. Ehud made a dagger. Now the word 'dagger' can also be translated as 'sword' and probably a small sword is what is meant. A dagger a cubit long (18 inches or

which can only be done when a town-wall has been built. But if setting up the gates would be a sign of the completion of the wall, and therefore of the restoration of the town as a fortification, the "founding" (laying the foundation) mentioned in the parallel clause can only be understood as referring to the foundation of the town-wall.' Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*.

45.72 cm.) is nearly as long as a Roman *gladius* (55 cm.).² Notice that it was a two-edged sword, again much like a Roman *gladius*.

The symbolism of this is not hard to spot,

The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Eph 6:17

The word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword. Heb 4:12

He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance *was* like the sun shining in its strength. Rev 1:16

Out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. Rev 19:15

The sword represents the word of God, especially the word which results in judgment upon the wicked.

The only way of dealing with the old nature is the application of the word of God. It is by God's word that we live

That He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every *word* that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD. Deut 8:3

Although the just live by faith, faith must be placed in God's word. The renewing of the mind, essential for living a worshipful life, is what enables us to live in obedience to God's will (Rm 12:1-2); and this entails knowing, studying and obeying the word of God. There is no dealing with the old nature except by obedience to God's word. To live right our thinking must be changed, and this change or renewal comes by seeing and obeying God's word in faith.

Then Ehud made his own sword. He did not go to a blacksmith and get someone to take the chance of manufacturing a sword for him. He took the risks himself and made his own, according to his own design. He also needed to do this in secret, trusting no one.

This is very important. We must not let someone else do our devotions for us! We must study God's word for ourselves and develop our own understanding and not be moulded by men. We must check things out for ourselves to see if it is so, like the Bereans (Acts 17:11). There is no great value in daily reading someone else's Bible study. It may tickle the flesh, it may stimulate the feelings, but it will not do as profiting from the word. We must get into God's word for ourselves. We must make our own swords. Growth in understanding God's word occurs in secret, in our private study and devotions.

He wielded the sword

Then he applied the sword himself. He did not seek someone stronger and more able; he did not get an accomplice, he did not ask for help – he struck with his own weapon.

This is how the man of God works; he is decisive and acts in clear conscience upon the word of God. He wields the sword. Far too many people in churches these days constantly seek help and counselling. This was not the case in the past. All the modern plethora of counselling ministries never existed in past centuries. There were no psychotherapy

² The classical Roman sword is called a *gladius*, which was up to 55 cm. long. There are two main types: a) the earlier *gladius hispaniensis* / Mainz with a short blade, broader towards the handle; b) the later type *Pompeianus* / *Pompeii* (used from the middle of the first century AD) which was two-edged with a triangular tip for close combat.

sessions, no multiple exorcisms, no inner healing ministries, and none of the other myriad forms of counselling in vogue today. What happened in the past was that people were taught God's word and shown how to apply it to themselves. This work of ministry is universally avoided by many modern leaders because it is tiresome and needs a long commitment. Instead we have the multifarious ministries which are mostly not even conducted by elders but others without authority or Biblical sanction.

We do not need modern new age counselling but we need the truth, which sets us free. Very occasionally a person may require special counselling from an elder due to a trauma, such as bereavement or illness, but in general a believer can deal with most things if he is filled with God's word. Ehud wielded his own sword.

Ehud takes decisive action

He had a plan and carried it out effectively. Knowing that God was with him and that his assassination attempt was divinely ordered, he boldly managed to get a private audience with the king. Here he plunged the sword to the hilt into Eglon's belly. In dealing with the old nature we must take drastic action and plunge God's word into to heart of the problem. There can be no mincing about or wishy-washy excuses, we must attack the heart of the flesh – the old nature must be identified and put off.

Those *who are* Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Gal 5:24

We cannot patch up the old nature. This is like putting a patch on an old wineskin, it will ruin it. The only action proper to the old nature is to crucify it that is, believe that it has been crucified (put to death) by the cross and live in the good of that truth. The old nature cannot be restored, improved and made righteous; it must be destroyed and believers must put on the new nature in its place.

As the only solution to Israel's oppression was the death of the invading king, so the only answer to our sin problem is to live in the good of the death of the old nature. Once the king is dead all his soldiers are killed off easily, even though they were strong men of valour; so also when we put off the old nature, then all the sins promoted by it will be dealt with easily. You cannot struggle to stop committing habitual sin by effort, you must first trust God's word, understand it, put off the old nature and then the sins can be denied easily.

The result

The outcome of Ehud's work was deliverance for the people for two generations. The trumpet of jubilee was sounded to gather men for war and the rout was immediate and effective. It also involved wise strategy by cutting off escape across the Jordan or for reinforcements from Moab.

When we deal with the old nature we must stop feeding it. We must cut off its supplies. The flesh is crucified, which is a slow death involving hunger and thirst. The old nature, once put off, must not be fed. This means avoiding those things which would stimulate the old nature into raising itself into action again. Don't get involved with things that stimulate temptation. Temptation comes through the senses and triggers inward desires which create lust for sin. We can short-circuit this process by keeping ourselves from those things which trigger our lusts, and these vary. For example a person who was once an alcoholic should keep away from drink and not frequent bars. This is basic discipleship.

Conclusion

This simple exposition shows how valuable historical narratives can be if we try to see what God is telling us. We know that all Scripture is, 'given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for

doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Tim 3:16-17). This means that even historical narratives of obscure parts of Israel's background are useful to learn doctrine and train us in godliness, if we would look carefully. Do not ignore the historical parts of Scripture; they are valuable.

This particular story, as well as pointing to the victory of the Lord Jesus, tells us how to deal with the old nature and overcome our enemy – our inward sin which subdues us. It is a valuable lesson.

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
© Thomas Nelson 1982

Paul Fahy Copyright © 2010
Understanding Ministries
<http://www.understanding-ministries.com>