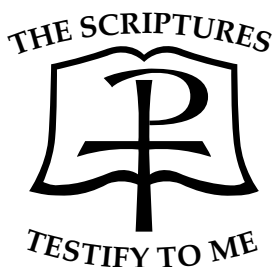


CONCORDIA COMMENTARY

A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture

JUDGES 1-9

Mark E. Braun



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the text to determine the imagined original pieces that may have preceded it, making such methodologies serviceable for the exegete who rightly holds the high view of Scripture.

The Purpose of the Book of Judges

The theme of the book can be said to be “the Canaanization of Israelite society” during the period of the Israelites’ settlement of the land.⁵²¹ The author’s goal, Block maintains, was to alert his own generation, to make “an appeal to the covenant people to abandon all forms of paganism and return to Yahweh.” Left on their own, “the Israelites would surely have destroyed themselves.” Yet the book of Judges is also “a profound commentary on the grace of God.” Only by the “repeated gracious intervention” of Yahweh was it possible for them to “emerge from the dark pre-monarchic period as a separate people and nation.”⁵²² Unfortunately, many who claim to be God’s people today have also been “thoroughly Canaanized. Not only has the church taken on features of the pagan world around it, but it also suffers from the same social ills that plague the outside world.”⁵²³

Many commentators point to the title of the book, “Judges,” and conclude that the central characters of the book are the judges themselves. However, “this misses the overall message of the book, its overarching plot,” and the theological message of the book as a whole.⁵²⁴ “Yahweh” (יהוה) appears in every chapter of the book (a total of one hundred and seventy-five times) except for chapter 9, which has “God” (אלהים), a total of seventy-three times in the book). It is certainly true that God is the *primary* unifying character. Throughout the book, he operates behind the scenes as the Redeemer of his people and the Preserver of his promises. Israel in its entirety is also a unifying character throughout the entire book. The term “judge” (שפוט or שפֹּט) appears in eight chapters (a total of twenty-one times), but not, for example, in the first chapter nor in the final five chapters. While the exploits of individual judges “provide the driving force of the many different plots and scenes,” theologically, the book is a “coherent tragedy.”⁵²⁵

Moore believed that the purpose of the book was to impress the lesson that “unfaithfulness to Yahweh is always punished; that whenever Israel falls away from him, he withdraws his protection and leaves it defenceless before its foes.”⁵²⁶ As Young points out, the book demonstrates that “the theocratic people need a righteous king. Without a king who reigns under the special authority of God, confusion follows.” Thus the book has a negative purpose. When the

⁵²¹ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 58; see also Block, “The Period of the Judges.”

⁵²² Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 58; see also Block, “The Period of the Judges.”

⁵²³ Block, “Unspeakable Crimes,” 47.

⁵²⁴ Heller, *Judges*, 10.

⁵²⁵ Heller, *Judges*, 11.

⁵²⁶ Moore, *Judges*, xvi.

people were without a ruler, there needed to be “awakened within them longings and aspirations after a true king.”⁵²⁷ As the Judges period progressed, the people were brought to see their need.

McCann made the astounding claim that “the book of Judges may be the most timely and relevant of all the books in the Old Testament,” since it deals with perennial maladies of humanity:

- tension and strife between rival groups ...
- disputes over land and territory
- uncertainty over the roles of men and women
- power-hungry political leaders
- child abuse
- spouse abuse
- senseless and excessive violence
- male political leaders who chase women
- excessive individualism
- moral confusion
- social chaos⁵²⁸

Evans notes that historically, the events depicted in the book are one portion of a much larger story. They are presented “as coming between the entry of the tribes of Israel into the Promised Land as described in Joshua, and the accounts of the life of Samuel and the beginning of the monarchy as described in the books of Samuel.” Judges shows that “the promises made to Abraham and through Moses were never going to be worked out without some further direct action by God.”⁵²⁹ If one attempts to view the book apart from the sweep of salvation history, it is impossible to see it as good news. But, as Smit points out, “set within the grand narrative” of Scripture, “Judges fills an essential role.” If Scripture is indeed “a long drama with a happy ending,” centered in the salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ at his first advent and culminating in his return in glory, “Judges is that moment in the first act when it seems that all is lost.”⁵³⁰

Smit continues that the book presents “extensive proof of the ineffectiveness of the law to save” and the ongoing need of the people of God “for His gracious intervention generally and for the sending of a mediating deliverer specifically.” The people of Israel cannot keep the Law and cannot save themselves. Yet “unlike the first readers or hearers of Judges, we come to these scenes already knowing the next act of the play. It is futile for a Christian to read the Old Testament as if unaware of the gift of Jesus Christ.” There is “a long tradition of seeing all or most of the judges as types of Christ, pointing forward to his

⁵²⁷ Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 170.

⁵²⁸ McCann, *Judges*, 1–2.

⁵²⁹ Evans, *Judges and Ruth*, 11.

⁵³⁰ Smit, *Judges*, 7.

saving work.”⁵³¹ Upon closer inspection, many of the leading characters were not types of Christ wholly or at all, but “antitypes” who brought ruin on God’s people instead of salvation. Much more clearly, the book of Judges “serves to demonstrate with stark clarity how deep is our need for a Savior who will rescue us from the effects of our sin.” In doing so, the book “prepares us for the good news” of the Gospel.⁵³²

⁵³¹ Smit, *Judges*, 11–12.

⁵³² Smit, *Judges*, 22.

The Template of the Judges Cycles

Translation

2 ¹¹The people of Israel committed the evil in the eyes of Yahweh: they served the Baals, ¹²and they abandoned Yahweh, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and they bowed down to them, and they provoked Yahweh. ¹³They abandoned Yahweh and served the Baal and the Ashtaroth.

¹⁴So the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel, and he gave them into the hand of plunderers, and they plundered them. He sold them into the hand of their enemies around them, and they were no longer able to stand up in the face of their enemies. ¹⁵Whenever the men of Israel went out, the hand of Yahweh was against them to [bring] disaster [on them], just as Yahweh had said and as Yahweh had sworn to them. They were greatly distressed.

¹⁶But Yahweh raised up judges who saved them from the hand of their plunderers. ¹⁷But even to their judges they did not listen! Instead, they prostituted themselves after other gods and bowed down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked, [their fathers] who had obeyed the commands of Yahweh. They [the Israelites of the contemporary generation] did not do so [obey as their fathers did].

¹⁸Whenever Yahweh raised up judges for them, Yahweh was with the judge and he saved them from their enemies all the days of the judge, because Yahweh had compassion because of their groaning caused by their oppressors and tormenters. ¹⁹But then, when the judge died, they reverted to acting corruptly even more than their fathers by going after other gods, serving them, and worshiping them. They refused to let go of their evil practices and their stubborn way.

²⁰So the anger of Yahweh burned against Israel. He said, “Because this nation has violated my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and they did not obey my voice, ²¹for my part, I will no longer drive out from before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died, ²²in order to test Israel by them, whether they would keep the way of Yahweh, to walk on it as their fathers kept [it] or not.” ²³So Yahweh left behind these nations and did not drive them out quickly. He did not give them into the hand of Joshua.

Textual Notes

2:11–14 Chisholm, quoting Longacre, maintains that the imperfect *waw* consecutive verb forms used throughout 2:11–14 are “only weakly sequential” but tend to be “reiterative, complementary, or focusing/specifying.” Longacre proposes that the broader function of these verses is to mark the entire book’s “inciting incident” and that such “inciting incidents” use “synonyms and repetitions as if successive actions were being

portrayed.” Judg 2:12b reiterates 2:11b but complements 2:12a. Judg 2:13a reiterates 2:12a, while 2:13b reiterates 2:11b.¹

2:11 וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה—Expressions with עָשָׂה, “to do,” and הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה, “the evil in the eyes of Yahweh,” recur in 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1 and more than fifty times in the OT (e.g., Num 32:13; Deut 4:25; 9:18; 17:2; 31:29). The clause provides a formal link between this template (2:11–23) and the narratives that come after it. As Block notes, “evil” (רַע or רָעָה), here used as a substantive, may denote something “disagreeable, bad, malignant, ill,” but more often in the OT, it refers to what is “morally evil” or “spiritually malignant.” While sinful actions may result in negative physical or social consequences, “evil” primarily denotes a violation of the will of God.² Every sin is inherently rebellion against God, and any measure of obedience to God’s commandments can flow only from a heart changed by grace to have fear and love of God.

וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ אֶת־הַבַּעַלִּים—The Israelites “served Baal/the Baals” also in 2:13; 3:7; 10:6, 10. בַּעַל is a common Semitic noun meaning “owner,” “husband,” or “lord.” It is the name of the main Canaanite fertility god. The plural refers to various manifestations of the same deity, as in “the Baals” (2:11). Texts can also refer to the Baal of a particular location, such as “Baal of Peor” (Num 25:3), or to a particular association of the deity, such as “Baal-berith” in Judg 8:33. The singular can also be used in a collective sense for all of the local forms of Baal, as in 2:13, where the singular בַּעַל is used with the plural עֲשֵׂתָרוֹת, “Ashtaroth.” Since Baal was a fertility god, he was associated with a fertility goddess or goddesses. See the textual note on 2:13.³

2:12 וַיִּלְכְּדוּ אֲחֵרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים—Here is the fundamental sin the Israelites committed repeatedly in the book of Judges. See אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים, “other gods,” also in 2:17, 19; 10:13.

וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לָהֶם—This verb for “bow down, worship” is חָוָה in the Hishtaphel stem (Joüon, §§ 59 g; 79 t; cf. Waltke-O’Connor, § 21.2.3d). This verb recurs in 2:17, 19; 7:15. It expresses an attitude of reverent submission, which should be directed to the one true God alone, as does its NT counterpart προσκυνέω. Block explains that the Hebrew verb “represents court language, denoting fundamentally the physical gesture of prostration before a superior.” The gesture is “a nonverbal equivalent to the declaration ‘May X live!’”⁴

וַיִּכְעֹס אֶת־יְהוָה—In the Qal, כָּעַס means “be angry, vexed.” The Hiphil of כָּעַס, “provoke to anger, offend, insult,” consistently refers to Israel inciting Yahweh’s wrath

¹ Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 148, quoting Robert E. Longacre, “*Weqatal* Forms in Biblical Hebrew Prose: A Discourse-Modular Approach, in *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (ed. Robert Bergen; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 64.

² Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 123. Schneider, *Judges*, 30, explains: “The specific object which is ‘bad’ is never defined. While the translation, ‘the bad thing,’ appears to be a poor form of English slang, this translation best reflects the Hebrew.”

³ See also “Canaanite Worship” in “The Ancient Context of Judges” in the introduction and the commentary on 2:11.

⁴ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 126.

by their idolatry.⁵ In Deut 32:16, 21, this verb is parallel to **קָנָא** in the Hiphil and Piel, “to make (God) jealous.”

2:13 **וְלֹעַשְׁתָּרוֹת**—“Ashtaroth” is a Hebrew plural, but the word is “not to be taken numerically as she is the one who in herself sums up the variations of her identity in numerous forms and places.”⁶ Judges includes two names for goddesses who were consorts of Baal: Asherah and Ashtoreth (whose plural is Ashtaroth). See **תַּת־הָאֲשֵׁרֹת** **וְאֵת־הָאֲשֵׁרֹת** **הַבְּעָלִים**, “the Baals and the Asheroth,” in 3:7, and the Asherah beside the altar of Baal in 6:25–30. The goddess indicated by the plural **וְלֹעַשְׁתָּרוֹת**, “Ashtaroth,” in 2:13; 10:6; and elsewhere in the OT probably is to be equated with the goddess called Astarte or Ishtar in extrabiblical texts.⁷

2:14 **וַיִּחַר־אַף יְהוָה**—The author now introduces a new subsection, reporting Yahweh’s angry reaction to the sin described in 2:11–13.⁸ This is the first instance in Judges of a common expression for God’s anger, literally, “Yahweh’s nose burned hot” (also 2:20; 3:8; 6:39; 10:7; similarly for human anger in 9:30; 14:19). It must be understood “against the background of extravagant demonstrations of grace in the past.”⁹

וַיִּתְּנֵם בְּיַד־שׂוֹטִים וַיִּשְׁפוּ אוֹתָם—For the idiom “give into the hand of,” see the second textual note on 1:2. The exact wording **וַיִּתְּנֵם בְּיַד־**, God “gave them into the hand of” an enemy, recurs in 6:1 and 13:1; see also, similarly, 11:32 (but positively for Israel in 12:3). Two by-forms are represented in **וַיִּשְׁפוּ**. The Qal participle **שׂוֹטִים** is from **שָׁפוּ**, “to plunder, despoil,” which occurs eleven times in the OT, usually as a participle; see also **שָׁפוּ** in 2:16. The Qal imperfect **וַיִּשְׁפוּ** is from **שָׁפוּ**, which occurs six times in the OT, with the same meaning, “to plunder.”

2:15 **וַיֵּצֵא אֹשֶׁר יֵצְאוּ | בְּכָל־**—The verb **יֵצֵא**, “to go out,” can function as a technical term for marching out into battle. LXX^A has *ἐν παντι οἷς ἐπόρνευον*, “in everything by which they committed sexual immorality.” This may have been the result of a hearing error (*zanu* instead of *yatsu*) or a Greek copyist’s error, writing *ἐπόρνευον* instead of *ἐξέπορευοντο*, which is the reading of LXX^B.¹⁰ The error might also have been influenced by **וַיֵּצֵא** in 2:17, which the LXX rendered as *ἐξέπορνευσαν*.

וַיִּדְּיָהוָה הַיְתָדָה־בָּם לְרָעָה—Literally, “the hand of Yahweh was against them for disaster.” The feminine noun **רָעָה** is a play on the substantivized masculine adjective **רָע** in 2:11. Because Israel did the evil in the eyes of Yahweh, he had now become their enemy. When they went to battle, he ensured their disaster. Earlier Yahweh had promised, as part of his covenant blessings and curses, that military defeat would be the result if they abandoned faithfulness to him (Deut 28:25–37; 31:16–21).

⁵ See, e.g., Deut 4:25; 9:18; 31:29; 32:16, 21; 1 Ki 14:9, 15; 15:30; 16:13, 26, 33; 22:54 (ET 22:53); 2 Ki 17:11, 17; 21:6, 15, 17; 23:19, 26 (Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 157).

⁶ Boling, *Judges*, 74.

⁷ See “Canaanite Worship” in “The Ancient Context of Judges” in the introduction and the commentary on 2:11.

⁸ Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 154.

⁹ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 126.

¹⁰ Butler, *Judges*, 37.

כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר יְהוָה וְכַאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה לָהֶם—The text contains these two clauses that are very similar and apparently overlapping: “just as Yahweh had said and as Yahweh had sworn to them.” The clause with the Niphal of שָׁבַע, “to swear,” repeats the thought but with a more powerful meaning: Yahweh said it, *and he swore on oath to them*. It contrasts with the use of the same verb in 2:1, where the Angel of Yahweh recalls his promise to bring the Israelites “to the land that I swore to your fathers.”

וַיִּצְרָר לָהֶם מְאֹד—The Qal of צָרַר, “to bind up,” is often used impersonally and in an intransitive sense with לָ (DCH, צָרַר I, Qal, 2), literally, “it was distressing to them greatly.” The construction can be translated with the indirect object (the suffix on לָהֶם) as the subject: “they were greatly distressed.”

2:16 וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה שְׁפָטִים וַיִּשְׁלֵמוּם מִיַּד שִׁסְיָהֶם—This immediately follows the description of Israel’s desperate straits. The author began “to speak of divine mercy without any hint of prior repentance.”¹¹ The vocabulary here has tremendous theological significance for the whole book. The “judges” (שְׁפָטִים) did not simply appear or volunteer. Yahweh “raised up” (the Hiphil of קָוַם, again in 2:18) these leaders. Their divine vocation is defined in conjunction with the Hiphil of יָשַׁע, “to save.”¹²

2:17 וְגַם אֶל־שְׁפָטֵיהֶם לֹא שָׁמְעוּ—Note the strong adversative and the emphatic word order, literally, “but on the contrary (וְגַם) to their judges they did not listen.”

כִּי זָנוּ אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים—English translations render this provocative clause variously: “They played the harlot after other gods” (RSV). “They lusted after other gods” (NSRV). They “turned wantonly to worship other gods” (NEB). “They went a whoring after other gods” (KJV).

The verb זָנָה generally means “to be a prostitute,” and its feminine participle, זֹנֵה, is a frequent OT term for a female “prostitute” (11:1; 16:1). The verb is used for Israel’s idolatrous whoring also in 8:27, 33. Goodfriend suggests several reasons why Israel’s apostasy should be characterized as prostitution (זָנָה) rather than adultery (נָאֲרָה): (1) זָנָה implies habitually illicit behavior, motivated by the desire for personal gain. (2) It implies multiple partners. (3) The participial form suggests a treacherous and hardened woman.¹³ Hosea (Hos 3:3; 9:1), Jeremiah (Jer 2:20; 3:1–3), and Ezekiel (Ezek 16:30–31; 23:44) also used the metaphor of prostitution (זָנָה).¹⁴ The verb used here is also different than the terminology for “sacred” prostitutes in Canaanite idolatry, a sin into which Israel fell.¹⁵ The term זָנָה is sadly appropriate to depict Israel’s apostasy because Yahweh’s covenant relationship with Israel is portrayed frequently in marital

¹¹ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 128.

¹² For the use of this vocabulary, see further “The Cycles of the Judges Stories” in “The Center Cannot Hold” in the introduction.

¹³ Elaine Adler Goodfriend, “Prostitution (OT),” *ABD* 5:505–10.

¹⁴ Soggin, *Judges*, 39.

¹⁵ The feminine term קְדֻשָּׁה, “female sacred prostitute,” and/or the masculine term קְדֻשׁ, “male sacred prostitute,” occur in, e.g., Gen 38:21–22; Deut 23:18 (ET 23:17); 1 Ki 14:24; 15:12; 22:47 (ET 22:46); Hos 4:14. Despite clear contextual evidence for these meanings, some argue that these terms do not refer to a cult prostitute set apart for ritual sexual behavior. Cf. Phyllis A. Bird, “Prostitution,” *OCB* 623–24.

terms and because the gods competing with Yahweh for Israel's attention were fertility gods attempting to seduce Israel with promises of security and prosperity.

סָרוּ בַּהֶר—This wording with סָרוּ, “turn aside,” and the Piel infinitive construct בָּהֶר, “hurry;” used adverbially, “turned aside quickly,” occurs elsewhere only in the accounts of the golden calf apostasy (Ex 32:8; Deut 9:12, 16).¹⁶

מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר הָלְכוּ אֲבוֹתָם—The relative clause in “from the way in which their fathers had walked” assumes that their fathers had been obedient, yet the golden calf generation had also been disobedient to Yahweh, and the majority of that generation had died in the wilderness (see 1 Cor 10:1–5).

לְשָׁמַע מִצִּוּוֹת־יְהוָה—The infinitive construct of שָׁמַע, “to listen,” with לְ elaborates the preceding verb הָלְכוּ (Joüon, § 124 o): the manner in which the fathers had “walked” was “by listening to/obeying the commandments of Yahweh.” Similar is לֵלְכָה, “by going;” in 2:19.

2:18 וַיִּקְרָא יְהוָה אֶל־הַשֹּׁפְטִים | לָהֶם שֹׁפְטִים—This verse resumes the description of Yahweh raising up judges in 2:16. The resumptive clause is necessitated by the interruption of the train of thought in 2:17. The author is characterizing the period, describing a pattern that happened time and again.

Chisholm describes the structure of 2:18–19: The construction כִּי, “when,” with a perfect verb form (הִקְרָא, “raised up”) is technically a subordinate clause. Next, two perfect verb forms, וַיִּשְׁעֵם and וַיִּהְיֶה, appear in 2:18b, where one might have expected imperfect *waw* consecutive verbs. By contrast, in 2:19, after a transitional וַיְהִי, literally, “and it was,” with a temporal infinitive clause, a customary imperfect appears (יָשָׁבוּ, “they would return/do again”), followed by a perfect *waw* consecutive (וַיִּשְׁתָּאֲרוּ). Chisholm explains that the Hebrew style utilized in 2:18–19 “makes it clear that the narrator is characterizing the period and describing a pattern that time and again repeats itself.”¹⁷

וַיְהוֹשִׁיעֵם מִיַּד אֲיִבֵיהֶם כֹּל יְמֵי הַשּׁוֹפֵט—It is unclear whether the subject of this clause is Yahweh or the judge. The ambiguity may emphasize both that Yahweh called the judges to act as his human agents and that Yahweh alone is the ultimate source of salvation. On the one hand, the immediately preceding word is הַשּׁוֹפֵט. On the other hand, the two preceding third masculine singular verbs in 2:18 have Yahweh as their explicit subject (וַיִּהְיֶה ... וַיִּקְרָא). “The overall tenor of the text ... highlights the initiative of Yahweh.”¹⁸ The syntax of the rest of the clause would be redundant with הַשּׁוֹפֵט as the subject (“[the judge] saved them ... all the days of the judge”) and is smoothest with Yahweh as the subject: “[Yahweh] saved them ... all the days of the judge.”

כִּי־יָנַחֵם יְהוָה מִנְּצַקְתָּם מִפְּנֵי לִחְצִיחֵם וּדְחַקֵּיהֶם:—The verb יָנַח is related to the Arabic “to breathe deeply,” a sense sometimes recognizable also in OT contexts. In the Niphal, it can denote “to perform mourning rites” (Gen 38:12) or “to take comfort, be encouraged” (Ezek 14:22; 31:16; 32:31). In some contexts, it operates as a synonym for שָׂוֵה,

¹⁶ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 129.

¹⁷ Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 149, note 5.

¹⁸ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 129, note 237.

“to turn around, repent,” and can indicate regret over past actions, both of human beings (Jer 4:28; 31:19) and of God (Gen 6:6–7; 1 Sam 15:11, 35; Jonah 3:9–10). Here, as perhaps also in Gen 6:6–7, the meaning may be that God “changes his course of action”: God did not punish the Israelites as they deserved but instead acted mercifully. Thus the Niphal of **חָנַן** here and in a few other verses can be rendered as “be moved to pity” or “have compassion” (*DCH*, 2).

“Groaning” and “oppression” are reminiscent of bondage in Egypt. The noun **אִנְיָה** occurs three other times in the OT, two of which refer to the Israelites’ groaning as slaves in Egypt (Ex 2:24; 6:5). Yahweh heard their “groaning,” remembered his covenant, and rescued them (Ex 2:23–25).¹⁹ The only other instance of the noun in the OT is in Ezek 30:24, where it describes “the paralinguistic utterances” of a wounded man whose arms were broken.²⁰

The two participles **לְחַצְיָהֶם וְדַחְקֵיהֶם** are synonyms. The Qal of **לָחַץ** often means “squeeze, press” in a physical or literal sense (for example, Balaam’s donkey getting squeezed against the wall and then pressing Balaam’s foot against the wall, Num 22:25), but it is frequently used in a metaphorical sense: “oppress” (*DCH*, Qal, 2). The verb **דָּחַק** occurs elsewhere only in Joel 2:8.

2:19 **וְהָיָה | בְּמוֹת הַשּׁוֹפֵט**—This is another temporal clause describing the recurring pattern (see the first textual note on 2:18). The next stage in the cycle was “when the judge died ...”

וְשָׁבוּ וְהִשְׁתִּיתוּ מֵאֲבוֹתָם—Literally, “they returned, and they acted [more] corruptly than their fathers.” **שָׁבוּ** refers to the Israelites “returning” to idolatry also in 8:33. Its imperfect here, **יִשְׁבּוּ**, expresses repeated past action (Joüon, § 119 u). The following perfect *waw* consecutive, **וְהִשְׁתִּיתוּ**, has the same sense as the preceding imperfect (GKC, § 112 e). The Hiphil of **שָׁחַת** often has a transitive meaning (e.g., “to destroy, ruin”), but it can also have the intransitive meaning “behave in a corrupt way, act in a sinful way” (*DCH*, שָׁחַת I, Hiphil, 9). After the verse’s initial perfect *waw* consecutive, **וְהָיָה**, the imperfect **יִשְׁבּוּ** indicates repeated past action (GKC, § 112 ee; Joüon, § 119 u), and the following perfect *waw* consecutive, **וְהִשְׁתִּיתוּ**, likewise has a frequentative sense (GKC, § 112 e). The two verbs **יִשְׁבּוּ וְהִשְׁתִּיתוּ** are best taken together as a hendiadys: “they regressed/reverted to their habitual corrupt behavior.” Block calls this verse “crucial for interpreting the following narratives. Israel is depicted as increasingly Canaanized, spiraling downward into worse and worse apostasy.” Not only does the pattern of evil repeat itself, but “the treacherous behavior of the Israelites [also] intensifies.”²¹

וְלֹא הִפִּילוּ מִמַּעַלְלֵיהֶם—Among the causative meanings of the Hiphil of **נָפַל**, “to fall,” is to “drop” in the sense of “abandon” a behavior (*DCH*, נָפַל I, Hiphil, 5). The noun **מַעַלְלִים** can refer to any kind of “deed,” but it usually refers to wicked ones. Thus they refused to drop their evil actions. The judges raised up by Yahweh “represented

¹⁹ Davis, *Such a Great Salvation*, 40. The very word “should carry our minds back to Exodus.”

²⁰ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 130.

²¹ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 132.

stop-gap measures in an apparently irresistible, irreversible, and inevitable process of Canaanization.²²

וּמִדֶּרֶךְ כָּפַם הַקָּשָׁה:—Yahweh employed the adjective קָשָׁה (feminine קָשָׁה) shortly after the exodus when he foresaw that the people would continue to be “stiff-necked” (Ex 32:9; 33:3, 5). It was one thing to take the Israelite out of Egypt, but it was another to take Egypt out of the Israelite. They exchanged the דֶּרֶךְ of Yahweh given in the covenant for their own stubborn way, which will come into view in the following verses.

2:20 יַעַן אֲשֶׁר עָבְרוּ הַגּוֹי הַזֶּה אֶת־בְּרִיתִי—When עָבַר has the object בְּרִיתִי, the expression can have the nuance “transgress [Yahweh’s] covenant” (e.g., Deut 17:2; Josh 7:11; 23:16; Jer 34:18; Hos 6:7; see *DCH*, עָבַר I, Qal, 1 i, 2 o). Rather than calling Israel “my people,” here Yahweh refers to them as “this nation,” using the same term, גּוֹי, which in other contexts is often translated as “Gentile(s).”²³ גּוֹי can be “a cold, formal, and political” term, in contrast to עַם, “a warm, relational term.”²⁴ עַם is also the usual covenant term (e.g., Ex 6:7; Lev 26:12; Jer 7:23). It is rare in the OT for גּוֹי to be used for Israel; when it is, it often “bears overtones of reprimand for the nation’s infidelity to Yahweh.”²⁵ By using the same term for the Israelites that Yahweh uses for Canaanite nations twice in this same passage (2:21, 23), Yahweh is placing his own people in the same category as the heathen peoples around them.²⁶

2:21 גַּם־אֲנִי לֹא אוֹסִיף לְהוֹרִישׁ אִישׁ מִפְּנֵיהֶם—Note the emphatic wording, literally, “therefore I will not add to driving out.” When the Hiphil of יָסַף is used immediately before another verb, it may have the adverbial meaning “to repeat” an action or do it “again” (Joüon, § 177 b–c), hence “I will never again drive out.” The singular object אִישׁ adds to the emphatic nature of Yahweh’s statement. It can function like an indefinite pronoun, “someone, anyone,” and in a negative clause, it can mean “no one” (see *DCH*, אִישׁ I, 2).

2:22 לְמַעַן נִסּוּת בָּם אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל—The Piel of נָסָה, “to test,” recalls how God tested Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his only son (Gen 22:1) and how he tested Israel by giving them manna (Ex 16:4; see also Ex 15:25; 17:2, 7; Deut 8:2, 16). However, since Yahweh already had announced that Israel would not obey him, why did he institute this test? It would have been unnecessary for Yahweh’s benefit, but it would provide the Israelites an opportunity to have their trust in him exercised and to offer him repentant, grateful obedience. בָּם contains an instrumental use of the preposition בְּ, and the referent of its masculine plural suffix is הַגּוֹיִם, “the nations” in 2:21: God tested Israel “by means of them.” The same infinitive clause, אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּם, recurs in 3:1, 4.

²² Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 132.

²³ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 133. Davis, *Such a Great Salvation*, 43, calls this “a subtle hint that Israel is more like the pagan nations than like the people of Yahweh,” but the hint will become more obvious.

²⁴ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 133, note 258.

²⁵ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 133.

²⁶ Brown, *Judges*, 159.

הֲשָׁמְרוּם הֵם אֶת־דְּרֹךְ יְהוָה לְלַכְתָּ בָּם—The first clause is expressed in the form of an indirect question introduced with an interrogative *he*, הֲשָׁמְרוּם, “whether they would keep the way of Yahweh” (see BDB, הָ, 2 b).

The suffix on בָּם is masculine plural, whose implied antecedent would probably be statutes or commandments contained in דְּרֹךְ יְהוָה, “the way of Yahweh.” בָּם is translated as “on it” to agree with the singular noun דְּרֹךְ.

2:23 וַיִּנְחַח יְהוָה אֶת־הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה לְבִלְתִּי הוֹרִישָׁם מִהָאָרֶץ—The OT has two paradigms of the Hiphil of נָחַח. The verb here, וַיִּנְחַח, belongs to the second paradigm, whose forms appear as if from a root נָחַח, which can mean “leave behind, let remain,” as it does again in 3:1 (see BDB, נָחַח, Hiphil B, 2, and *DCH*, נָחַח I, Hiphil B, 2). The first Hiphil paradigm occurs in Yahweh’s promises to “give rest,” as in Josh 21:44: “and Yahweh gave [Israel] rest (וַיִּנְחַח) on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers” (see also Ex 33:14). While reading Judg 2:20–3:4, the fact that Joshua had left some nations unconquered prompts a review of that earlier period. Judg 3:1 will introduce a list of the nations (3:3) and repeat the reason why Yahweh left these nations in the land: to test Israel by means of them (3:1, 4, as in 2:22).

Commentary

Judg 2:11–23 provides the template of the Judges period. It describes “a pattern of apostasy, hardship, moaning, and rescue, a pattern to be illustrated for various segments of Israel in the stories which follow.”²⁷ It presents an outline of the plot for the Judges accounts.²⁸ Having such an outline, Webb contends, reduces the suspense in the later cycles (after reading it, the reader will already know the story and how it ends), yet it does not prevent us from appreciating “the detailed presentation of character, situation, and theme” in the narratives to follow. Indeed, it enhances our comprehension, as when “one is given a summary of the plot of a complex drama before it is presented on the stage.”²⁹

The worship of “other gods” (אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים) had been expressly prohibited in the Decalogue as the First Commandment in Yahweh’s foundational covenant with Israel (Ex 20:3; Deut 5:7). Now the Israelites abandoned Yahweh, the God of the patriarchs, who had recently redeemed the people from Egypt, and instead served the Canaanite storm-fertility god Baal and his consorts. The goddess named in 2:13 is Ashtoreth. The plurals “Baals” (2:11) and “Ashtaroth” (2:13) refer to these fertility deities in their various local forms. Worship of them was “*the evil*” (2:11). Such deities were especially attractive to Israelites because they “promised their worshipers agricultural prosperity, abundant offspring, and national security.”³⁰ The expression “walking/going after other gods” (2:12, 19) derives “fundamentally from the context of cultic processions

²⁷ Boling, *Judges*, 74.

²⁸ See “The Cycles of the Judges Stories” in “The Center Cannot Hold” in the introduction.

²⁹ Webb, *Judges*, 154–55.

³⁰ Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 157.



in which the devotees of a divinity would follow the image of a deity carried by priests to and from places of religious celebration.”³¹ “Going after other gods” became a technical term for all forms of apostasy (Judg 2:12, 19; see also, e.g., Deut 6:14; 8:19; 28:14; 1 Ki 11:10; Jer 11:10; 16:11).³²

In Canaanite mythology, the gods and goddesses could play a variety of roles and be depicted in multiple ways. Baal was a vibrant and significant god, often depicted as riding a bull, represented as the storm god who brought rain. In Ugaritic texts, Baal was called the son of Dagon (“grain”), and his name sometimes appeared interchangeably with that of Hadad. He was depicted holding a thunderbolt in one hand and swinging a mace with the other. He was believed to defend the natural order and maintain dependable rainfalls and fruitful growing seasons against the chaos caused by drought, death (the god Mot), or the sea (the god Yamm).³³ Baal alone among the pantheon of gods was sufficiently powerful to engage Mot. Baal’s descent into Mot, who swallowed him, represented the agricultural cycle, as life in a dry-summer subtropical climate entailed months of parchedness, theologically understood as the absence of the rain god.³⁴

In Ugaritic literature, the goddess Anath was the gory war goddess, sometimes portrayed as Baal’s consort. Athtart or Astarte also appeared alongside Anath as a war goddess who defended Baal and sometimes was his consort. Athtart may be equivalent to the Hebrew Ashtoreth, whose plural is Ashtaroth (see the textual note on 2:13). Baal was represented by upright stones (*masseboth*), and Astarte was portrayed with carved female figurines featuring exaggerated breasts and prominent genitalia. Often Astarte served as the Canaanite fertility goddess. Asherah could function as the mother goddess, the mother of Baal (and a total of seventy offspring), who interceded with Baal’s father, El, to provide a palace for Baal.³⁵ “Asherah” refers not only to the goddess but also to the consecrated poles that represented the deity at worship sites. Originally, the poles were thought to be living trees. Later some postulated that they were stylized carved poles representing trees, and later still some maintained that they were poles carved into images of the goddess.³⁶

³¹ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 125.

³² See Gerhard Kittel, “ἀκολουθέω,” *TDNT* 1:211.

³³ David G. Burke, “Baal,” *OCB* 70; John Day, “Baal,” *ABD* 1:545–49.

³⁴ Mark Anthony Phelps, “Baal,” *EDB* 134–35. Day, “Baal,” *ABD* 1:547, concluded that the Baal cult posed

the greatest and most enduring threat to the development of exclusive Yahweh worship within Israel. The fact that the Israelites were settled among the Canaanites, for whom the worship of Baal was so important, and that Palestine is a land utterly dependent for its fertility upon the rain, which was held to be Baal’s special realm of influence, accounts for the tempting nature of this cult as well as the strength of the OT polemic against it.

³⁵ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 125.

³⁶ Allen C. Myers, “Asherah,” *EDB* 112–13; John Day, “Asherah,” *ABD* 1:483–87. See also “Canaanite Worship” in “The Ancient Context of Judges” in the introduction.

What made the local Canaanite deities so powerful that they were able to draw Yahweh's covenant people away from him—and so quickly after he had showered on them his presence, many miraculous signs, and the gift of the land? Cheryl Brown explains:

Canaanite religions ... had strong appeal in two areas: physical gratification and economic security or success. ... The Baal cult operated on the principle of sympathetic magic, so in order to ensure fertility of people, animals, and crops, a person would engage in sexual intercourse with a cult prostitute—male or female—at the local Baal shrine [cf. 1 Ki 14:24; 15:12; 22:47 [ET 22:46]; Hos 4:14]. The purpose was to inspire Baal to act likewise on the person's behalf and thus to ensure fertility in all areas of life. Of course, the Lord promised his people that he would supply all their needs and even more. But they wanted to make sure that all their bases were covered, as it were, and so worshiped Baal along with the Lord.³⁷

As will become clear in the account of Gideon (Judg 6:1–8:35), attraction to Baal worship occurred not so much in direct opposition to and rejection of Yahweh as it did in a syncretistic mixture of worship of Yahweh and the observance of Canaanite fertility practices. Keil maintains that “the Israelites simply followed the lead and example of their heathen neighbours.” Their neighbors were tolerant in recognizing the gods of other nations, even the God of Israel, as long as the Israelites were also tolerant toward the Baals of other nations.³⁸ Yahweh sent the afflictions described in Judg 2:14–15 as a drastic but necessary chastisement. The people “did the evil” (2:11), they “served” the Baals (2:11, 13), they “followed” and “bowed down” to the Baals (2:12, 17, 19). The vocabulary used to describe Yahweh's response is even stronger: “his anger burned” (2:20), he gave them over to “plunderers” (2:14), he “sold” them to their enemies (2:14), he brought “disaster” upon them and let them be “greatly distressed” (2:15).

The relationship between God and his people is pictured as a marriage. The predominant OT picture is that God is the jealous husband and Israel is his wife, married to him at the exodus.³⁹ The NT depicts Jesus Christ as the Bridegroom and the church as his bride, with the wedding at his second coming.⁴⁰ Because of this marriage of God's people to God, both the OT and the NT depict spiritual unfaithfulness to God with the vocabulary of whoring, prostitution, adultery, and fornication. The verb in 2:17 is “prostituted themselves” (זָנְאוּ). Just as adultery breaks the earthly marriage bond (hence the Sixth Commandment, Ex 20:14; Deut 5:18),

so forsaking God, giving one's allegiance to other gods, is called adultery. The spirit of God led the holy writers to use this plain language, of course,

³⁷ Brown, *Judges*, 157.

³⁸ Keil, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 270.

³⁹ Jer 2:2; see Hosea; see also Is 50:1; 62:4–5; Jer 3:8; Ezek 16:8–14.

⁴⁰ See Mt 25:1–13; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:22–33; Rev 19:6–9; 21:2, 9; cf. Mt 9:15; Jn 3:29.

in order to bring home to sinful men that idolatry causes the Lord's anger to burn against the offenders and that he summons them to a quick and thorough repentance.⁴¹

Various templates offered for the Judges accounts present a cycle of apostasy, oppression, *repentance*, and deliverance, but the *absence* of any mention of repentance in 2:11–23 implies that “Yahweh’s actions will not typically be bound to any mechanical formula of blessing and/or retribution, based upon what human beings earn by their actions.”⁴² Instead, Yahweh intervenes to save Israel solely on the basis of his grace and mercy. “Yahweh had compassion” (2:18).

Repentance is necessary for us sinners, not because it is a good work through which we can merit the mercy of God, but because it is through the awareness of our guilt and the realization of our desperate need that we are moved to confess our sins and seek divine mercy.⁴³ For his part, Yahweh does not need sinners to repent, and God does not forgive us because we are sorry. He forgives solely by the merit of Jesus Christ, on account of his vicarious atonement, death, and resurrection for our sake.

I see my heart's condition now,
my heart's diverse affections.
Why do I love the things you loathe?
I'm torn in two directions:
now prodigal, now Pharisee,
O God, be merciful to me;
who else but you can help me?

I tremble as I feel your hand,
expecting retribution,
yet hear no curse or reprimand,
but grace and absolution.
With you there is forgiveness, Lord;
you speak the sweet, consoling word,
and I am sure you love me!⁴⁴

Not only does God's mercy come to us at no cost, but God is also under no obligation to grant it to us. There is nothing that lies *in us* for him to show such lavish mercy; *we do not merit* his grace. Even genuine sorrow over sin does not earn his undeserved love. The crushing message of God's Law reveals to us our need so that we will welcome God's message of grace, which we might otherwise ignore or take for granted. Yahweh chose to bind himself to

⁴¹ Franzmann, *Bible History Commentary: Old Testament*, 319.

⁴² Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 128.

⁴³ For repentance, contrition, and faith, see the commentary on 2:6–10 and AC VI, “The New Obedience.”

⁴⁴ CW 651:2–3. Text by Jaroslav J. Vajda © 1987 Concordia Publishing House.

his promises that he made to Israel’s ancestor Abraham, and he remains faithful to his promises.

Yahweh’s character is unchangeable and consistent (Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29), both to bring judgment on sin and to show undeserved mercy and forgiveness to sinners. Yahweh may change his course of action when sinners repent (Jer 18:8; 26:3, 13, 19; Jonah 3:9–10), when he considers the punishment sinners have suffered to be sufficient (2 Sam 24:16), when an intercessor intervenes on behalf of sinners (Ex 32:12, 14; Amos 7:2–3, 5–6), or when his people agree to do his will (Jer 42:10).⁴⁵ In this and other contexts, Yahweh is sensitive to human calamity and is moved to act in divine sympathy and compassion.⁴⁶ Yet even when God does not change his course of action and allows calamities and even death to befall us, believers die with the certain promise of the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection to eternal life on the Last Day (Jn 11:1–27).

One way to understand Judg 2:22 is to subordinate “to test” to the preceding declaration in 2:21 (לֹא אוֹסִיף לְהוֹרִישׁ אִישׁ מִכַּפְּרֵיהֶם מִן־הַגּוֹיִם): “I will no longer drive out from before them any of the nations ... *in order to test Israel by them*” (2:21–22). Taken in that way, Chisholm explains, Yahweh was announcing that he would “suspend the conquest of the land for a time and use the remaining nations to test the loyalty of present and future generations of Israelites.” One particular interpretation is that 2:23–3:3 could mean that Yahweh would allow these nations to escape Joshua’s conquest solely for the purpose of teaching new generations of Israelites the art of warfare (see 3:2). “Test” would then carry the sense of “teach” or “train.” This nuance of this verb (the Piel of נָסָה, 2:22; 3:1) “is not clearly attested elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, though it may be present in Exodus 20:20.”⁴⁷

A second view is take “to test” as modifying the immediately preceding wording, “any of the nations Joshua left when he died” (מִן־הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר־עָזַב יְהוֹשֻׁעַ יְהִיָּוָה, 2:21).⁴⁸ In that view, Yahweh had initially left the nations in the land after Joshua’s death to test Israel’s loyalty, but Israel had failed the test. Therefore Yahweh now announces his intention to let the nations remain as a punishment.

There is also an ontological dimension that modern people often miss, namely, that this language and imagery serve these purposes because marriage itself from the beginning (Gen 2:18–24) is grounded in the image of the true marriage of God wedded to his people. Whereas post-Enlightenment people are conditioned to think about typology *only* in epistemological terms as a way to explain relationships between chronologically earlier and later texts, the larger biblical-theological testimony makes a vertical, *ontological* dimension primary in this case. In NT terms, e.g., for St. Paul, Christ as the Bridegroom and the

⁴⁵ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 131, note 248.

⁴⁶ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 131.

⁴⁷ Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 159, including note 25.

⁴⁸ See Weinfeld, “The Period of the Conquest and the Judges as Seen by the Earlier and the Later Sources.”

church as his bride are the real marriage from which earthly marriage is derived, acquires its proper pattern, and thus can foreshadow it. Therefore Paul applies Gen 2:24 directly to Christ and the church (Eph 5:31–32).⁴⁹

Judg 2:11–23 is crucial to understanding the narratives that follow. While the author recognizes a cyclical pattern to the premonarchical history of Israel, these cycles will not merely repeat themselves but will spiral downward in Israel’s behavior.⁵⁰ The absence of repentance in this template of the Judges period puts Yahweh’s compassion (2:18) into even greater relief. Yahweh “was moved to pity by their groaning” (RSV, ESV), he “felt pity for them as they groaned” (JB); he “would relent as often as he heard them groaning” (NEB).

It may seem incongruous that God would “leave the foreign elements within Israel’s borders as a punishment for apostasy, and to test the future faithfulness of the nation, when the very reason for the nation’s defection is attributed to their failure to drive out this alien population.”⁵¹ For the Israelite historians who recorded the Scriptures, however, this presented no incongruity: human sin rightly deserves God’s judgment, but despite this, even when people are suffering the consequences of their sin, God’s gracious will remains to show compassion and save them (2:16, 18). Frequently God’s judgment consists of giving people over to their desires (see Rom 1:24–28). Yahweh was here teaching Israel that what they desired was not at all what they had expected it to be. Although Oscar Wilde was certainly not addressing theological questions, he nonetheless hit on this realization when he said: “There are two tragedies in life: one is not getting what you want, *and the other is getting it.*”

With each Judges account, Israel’s apostasy will become more distressing. The land had forty years of peace under the judgeship of Othniel (3:11), eighty years after Ehud (3:30), and forty years after Deborah (5:31). During the judgeship of Gideon, the land was quiet for forty years (8:28), but during his lifetime, the ephod he set up in his home city led all Israel to prostitute itself after it, and it became a snare for Gideon and his family (8:27). After his death, the people of Israel went back to prostituting themselves to the Baals and even set up Baal-berith as their god (8:33). After Gideon, the author makes no mention of rest at all. The episodes of Abimelech (9:1–57), Jephthah (11:1–12:7), Samson (14:1–16:30) and the accounts in the two appendices (17:1–18:31; 19:1–21:25) depict chaotic periods of increasing moral and spiritual breakdown.⁵²

While the author of Judges focused on his own time and era, the full revelation of Scripture gives us the broader fulfilled perspective. From the depths of Judges’ downward spiral, Yahweh renewed his covenant promises and restored faith and hope through David and faithful kings who followed him.

⁴⁹ See Winger, *Ephesians*, 652–53.

⁵⁰ See further “The Cycles of the Judges Stories” and “Progressive Degeneration” in “The Center Cannot Hold” in the introduction.

⁵¹ Cundall, *Judges*, 70–71.

⁵² See “Progressive Degeneration” in “The Center Cannot Hold” in the introduction.



Still, apostasy and disobedience arose time and again, but Yahweh nevertheless fulfilled his covenant promises through David's greater Son. After worship at the Jerusalem temple ceased and ethnic Israel was scattered throughout the world, Yahweh in sovereign freedom and grace gathered a new Israel consisting of Jews and Gentiles alike in Christ (Romans 9–11) from every nation, tribe, people, and language who have been brought by the Spirit of God to worship the Lamb of God (Rev 7:9–10). Disobedience and apostasy still plague the new Israel of God (Gal 6:16), the church, yet Jesus has always preserved his promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against his church (Mt 16:18). The Lord will preserve his church until the final gathering of his faithful people from every place and time.

The Left-Handed Savior

Translation

3 ¹⁵Again the people of Israel called out to Yahweh, and Yahweh raised up for them a savior—Ehud the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man restricted in his right hand. The Israelites sent by his hand a tribute payment to Eglon, the king of Moab. ¹⁶Ehud had made for himself a sword, which was double-edged, a short cubit [in] length, and he strapped it under his clothing on his right thigh. ¹⁷He presented the tribute payment to Eglon, the king of Moab. Now Eglon was a very fat man. ¹⁸After Ehud presented the tribute payment, he sent on their way the people delivering the tribute offering. ¹⁹After Ehud returned by way of the carved images that were at Gilgal, he said to Eglon, “I have something secret for you, O king!”

He [the king] said, “Silence!” and all those who attended him went out.

²⁰Ehud approached him as he was sitting in the cool upper chamber, which was his alone. He said, “I have something from God for you.” But when he rose from the throne, ²¹Ehud reached his left hand, took the sword strapped on his right thigh, and drove it into his [Eglon’s] belly. ²²The hilt went in after the blade, and the fat closed behind the blade—for he did not withdraw the sword from his [Eglon’s] belly—and his bowels spilled out. ²³Ehud then went out to the colonnaded portico, shut the doors of the upper chamber behind him, and bolted [them].

Textual Notes

3:15 וַיִּזְעַקוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יְהוָה—The reuse of זָעַק from 3:9 warrants supplying “again” in the translation (cf. also וַיִּסְפּוּ in 3:12).¹ As in 3:7, there is no explicit mention of repentance. Israel only cried out in pain, pleading for divine help.

בְּיָמָם יְהוָה לָחָם מוֹשִׁיעַ—See the textual note on 2:16 for יְהוָה לָחָם, and for מוֹשִׁיעַ, see the second textual note on 3:9. Ehud is described as a “savior.” While numbered among the judges, he is never given the specific designation שֹׁפֵט, “judge,” nor is he the subject of the verb שָׁפַט, “to judge.”²

אַתָּה יְהוָה—The definite direct object marker אַתָּה is used because a proper noun is definite, whereas it was not used for the preceding object, the indefinite participle מוֹשִׁיעַ used as a noun (Joüon, § 125 f). The name יְהוָה consists of two elements, the interrogative אַי, “where?” and the noun הוֹד, “splendor, majesty.” Taken together, the name asks, “Where is the majesty?” Like Ichabod, “Where is the glory?” (1 Sam 4:21), Ehud’s name reflected the despondency of the times.³

¹ For this recurring action, see the first textual note on 3:9 and “The Cycles of the Judges Stories” in “The Center Cannot Hold” in the introduction.

² Schneider, *Judges*, 49.

³ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 160.

בֶּן־גֵּרָא בֶּן־הַבְּנִימִינִי—Ehud was “the son of Gera the Benjaminite.” Shimei, of a later generation, was also described as a “son” of Gera (2 Sam 16:5; 19:17, 19 [ET 19:16, 18]), and Gera appears as a clan patronymic in the genealogy of Benjamin (1 Chr 8:3, 5, 7).⁴ The author viewed Ehud as the Benjaminite par excellence.⁵ The definite article appears in the construct phrase בֶּן־הַבְּנִימִינִי also in 2 Sam 16:11; 19:17 (ET 19:16); 1 Ki 2:8. The phrase without the article, בֶּן־הַבְּנִימִינִי, occurs in 1 Sam 9:21; Ps 7:1 (ET superscription).⁶ The gentilic adjective בְּנִימִינִי preserves the etymology (“right”) so as to accentuate the irony in the next phrase (see the next textual note).

בְּנִימִינִי אִישׁ אֲטֵר יְד־יְמִינִי—Yet this Benjaminite, a “son of the right hand” (בְּנִימִינִי, Gen 35:18), was “restricted in his right hand”! The man Yahweh selected to rescue Israel single-handedly was himself single-handed. Typically the “right hand” (יְמִינִי) was regarded as a symbolic of one’s strength, whether of men or of God. Yahweh saved Israel by the power of his right hand (יְמִינִי).⁷

The adjective אֲטֵר, “shut, bound” (*DCH*), is a *qittēl* pattern, which is often used for a physical defect (Waltke-O’Connor, § 5.4b, including example 7). The noun יָד, “hand,” can refer to the right hand when it is in construct with יְמִינִי, as here and elsewhere (see BDB, יָד, 1 a) or when יְמִינִי is parallel to it (e.g., Judg 5:26; Is 48:13; Ps 21:9 [ET 21:8]). The syntax is ambiguous as to whether אֲטֵר is in the absolute state or begins a construct chain with יְד־יְמִינִי (Waltke-O’Connor, § 10.2.2e, example 42). If absolute, then יְד־יְמִינִי is an accusative of specification for the affected body part (Waltke-O’Connor, § 10.2.2e, example 42). If in construct, then יְד־יְמִינִי is a genitive of the affected body part (GKC, § 128 y). The same three-word phrase, אֲטֵר יְד־יְמִינִי, recurs in 20:16. While the Hebrew specifically refers to disability in “his right hand,” most English versions render the phrase as “left-handed” (RSV, ESV, JB, NEB, NIV). The LXX called Ehud ἀμφοτεροδέξις, “ambidextrous,” which would suggest equal proficiency with either hand. For the meaning of the Hebrew phrase, see further the commentary.

בְּיַד־אֵל בְּיַד־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיָדוֹ—Further irony lies in the Israelites sending tribute to Eglon “by his [Ehud’s] hand.” In this passage, the only other occurrence of the noun יָד is in 3:21, where the phrase יָד שְׂבָאֵלוֹ indicates that “his left hand” was the “hand” he raised against Eglon.⁸

מִנְחָה—This can be a general noun for an “offering,” or it can specifically refer to “tribute,” as again in 3:17–18 (*DCH*, 2).

3:16 יַעַשׂ לֹו אָהוּד חָרַב—This copulative circumstantial clause (Joüon, § 159 d) is deliberately ambiguous. יַעַשׂ לֹו could mean “he made for himself,”⁹ and this reflexive sense may be the more obvious choice here (so Joüon, § 146 k; Waltke-O’Connor, § 16.4g, including example 34). But יַעַשׂ לֹו could also mean “he made/prepared for

⁴ Boling, *Judges*, 81.

⁵ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 160.

⁶ Cf. also 1 Sam 9:1; 2 Sam 20:1; Esth 2:5; 1 Chr 27:12.

⁷ E.g., Ex 15:6, 12; Pss 17:7; 18:36 (ET 18:35); 21:9 (ET 21:8); 48:11 (ET 48:10).

⁸ Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, 39.

⁹ As in Josh 5:3; 2 Sam 15:1; 1 Ki 1:5; 22:11; Jonah 4:5; Song 3:9; 1 Chr 15:1; 2 Chr 28:24; 32:27, 29.

someone/something else” (as in Gen 37:3; Ex 37:2, 11–12, 26–27; Neh 13:5),¹⁰ namely, that Ehud made this sword for Eglon.

The noun **חֶרֶב** is usually translated as “sword,” but it is capable of a wide range of meanings, from something small enough to be used as a razor (Ezek 5:1) to a long curved sword (1 Sam 17:51). Ehud’s weapon may have had no cross guard and thus could have been even more easily concealed.¹¹

וְלָהּ שְׁנֵי פִיּוֹת—The suffix on **לָהּ** (“belonging to it”) is feminine because **חֶרֶב** is feminine. The form **פִּיּוֹת** is the plural (or perhaps dual) of **פֶּה**, “mouth” (Jouion, § 98 e; cf. **פִּיּוֹת** in Prov 5:4, also in reference to a sword). The construct phrase **שְׁנֵי פִיּוֹת**, literally, “two of mouths,”¹² or double-edged, was designed “to facilitate a straight stab rather than a hacking stroke and to slice cleanly into the king’s flesh.”¹³

נֶמֶד אַרְבֵּה—The noun **נֶמֶד** occurs only here in the OT. It can be difficult to equate ancient measures, which could vary, to modern units. One proposal is that **נֶמֶד** was an equivalent to **אַמְבָּה**, “cubit,” generally the length of a forearm, from the elbow to fingertip (ca. eighteen inches). Another proposal is that **נֶמֶד** is the short cubit, measuring from the elbow to the knuckles of a clenched fist. Perhaps **נֶמֶד** was a smaller subdivision of **אַמְבָּה**, perhaps two-thirds of a cubit¹⁴ (just as **פַּיִם**, 1 Sam 13:21, was two-thirds of a shekel).¹⁵ **אַמְבָּה** occurs two hundred and fifty times in the OT and frequently also in extrabiblical literature, so the one-time occurrence of **נֶמֶד** here suggests a shorter measurement. Another study argues that a **נֶמֶד** was equivalent to one “fist,” another measure used in the ancient Near East, about four or four and a half inches long. If the sword needed to be shorter than his thigh, to which it was strapped, then the manner in which Ehud intended to use this sword required its length to be less than a standard cubit. The dagger was “short enough to hide under [Ehud’s] clothing, long enough to do in Eglon, and double-edged to ensure the fatality of one quick thrust.”¹⁶

Translating **נֶמֶד** as a unit of measure is reasonable, but Stone, appealing to etymological, contextual, and archaeological data, proposes that **נֶמֶד** was not a unit of measure but instead describes the sword as “stiff” or “rigid.” This type of sword, labeled by archaeologists as Naue Type II, had its hilt and blade cast in one piece to facilitate thrusting and slashing, in contrast to what was typical of the period in Canaan. “The whole inventory of eastern Mediterranean Naue Type II swords ranges from 19.5 inches

¹⁰ O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 95–96.

¹¹ Enns, *Judges*, 47.

¹² See Berman, “The ‘Sword of Mouths’ (Jud. iii 16; Ps. cxlix 6; Prov. v 4): A Metaphor and Its Ancient Near Eastern Context.”

¹³ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 163.

¹⁴ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 163, note 62; see D. J. Wiseman, “Weights and Measures,” *IBD* 3:1636; Marvin A. Powell, “Weights and Measures,” *ABD* 6:899–901.

¹⁵ Younger, *Judges and Ruth*, 115, note 11.

¹⁶ Younger, *Judges and Ruth*, 115. See also Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 39; Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands in the Light of Archaeological Study*, 254–55.

to just over 33 inches, with 24 inches being typical.”¹⁷ It would seem, however, that a sword even 20 inches in length would have been too long for Ehud to have concealed.

וַיִּחְגְּרוּ אֲחֵיהֶם בַּמַּחֲתָה לְמַחֲדוֹ עַל יַדְדֵי יְמִינֵהוּ:—Eglon’s soldiers felt no need to search a disabled man, and Ehud was counting on this. With his homemade weapon strapped to his right thigh, Ehud could enter the king’s presence, even if stiff-legged, without arousing suspicion. A verbal parallel is 1 Sam 17:39: לְמַחֲדוֹ בְּמַעַל לְמַחֲדוֹ, “David strapped his sword over his clothing.” Compare Judg 18:11, 16–17, where חָגַר, the Qal passive participle of the same Qal verb as used here, refers to soldiers who are “girded,” i.e., equipped or armed with weapons of war. The noun מִדָּ can be used in the plural for “clothing” (e.g., 1 Sam 4:12; 17:38). In Judg 5:10, its plural refers to saddle blankets.

3:17 וַיִּקְרַב אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה לְעֵגְלוֹן מֶלֶךְ מוֹאָב:—The Hiphil of קָרַב (see also לְהַקְרִיב in 3:18), literally, “to cause (something) to be near (to God or a king)” (cf. Waltke-O’Connor, § 27.2g, example 22a), especially when used with the object מִנְחָה,¹⁸ as here, has religious overtones. It is most often used in the OT of presenting an offering to God by laying it on the altar as a sacrifice.¹⁹ “The sacrificial language suggests that the offering of tribute to Eglon had sacrificial overtones for Israelites.”²⁰

וַעֲגֵלְוֹן אִישׁ בְּרִיאַ מְאֹד:—The author supplies this circumstantial or parenthetical clause, “now Eglon was a very fat man,” to provide important background information, the full significance of which will become apparent when the narrative unfolds in 3:21–22. The LXX reads ἀνὴρ ἄστειος σφόδρα, Eglon was “a very handsome man,” but the Hebrew text explicitly says Eglon was בְּרִיאַ מְאֹד, “very fat.” This finds contextual support in the description of Ehud’s short sword being buried inside the king’s belly (3:21–22). See further the textual notes on 3:22. However, some argue otherwise: (1) The phrase בְּרִיאַ מְאֹד could be translated as “very robust” or “well-fed.”²¹ Compare שָׂמֵן, which can describe food as “fat, rich” but which in 3:29 describes valiant Moabite soldiers as “robust.” (2) The text does not necessarily say that the sword was buried inside the king. The final clause of 3:22 could be describing the blade coming out of the king’s back (see the fourth textual note on 3:22), but “even if the blade did not come out Eglon’s back, this would not imply that he was obese.”²²

3:18 וַיְהִי כַּאֲשֶׁר כָּלָה לְהַקְרִיב אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה:—The imperfect *waw* consecutive וַיְהִי with כָּלָה begins a temporal clause: “when/after ...” The meaning of the perfect כָּלָה, “he finished,” is elaborated by לְהַקְרִיב, an infinitive construct with לְ: the action he finished doing was “to present the tribute.” See Joüon, §§ 124 o; 166 b, including the footnote; 166 n; Waltke-O’Connor, § 38.7a, including example 1.

The text does not specify where Eglon’s residence was located. Perhaps his headquarters were situated west of the Jordan River, near Jericho, or east of the river, with

¹⁷ Stone, “Eglon’s Belly and Ehud’s Blade,” 660–62.

¹⁸ On the religious overtones of מִנְחָה, “offering, tribute,” see the commentary on 3:15.

¹⁹ E.g., Lev 2:8; 6:7 (ET 6:14); 7:12; 23:16; Num 5:25; 6:16; 15:9.

²⁰ Webb, *Judges*, 171–72.

²¹ Stone, “Eglon’s Belly and Ehud’s Blade,” 651.

²² Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 175, note 4.

troops stationed on the other side. If Eglon was on the east side of the river, Ehud would have had to leave his home in Benjamin, west of the river, cross the river to present the tribute, cross back to Gilgal three miles northeast of Jericho, cross to the east again for his private interview with Eglon, and then escape by crossing the river a final time to the west, back to Gilgal and beyond. But if Eglon’s headquarters were west of the river, Ehud would not have needed to cross the river at all.²³

וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת־הַתְּעֹם נֹשְׂאֵי הַמִּנְחָה:—“Those carrying the tribute” is conveyed by the construct phrase הַמִּנְחָה נֹשְׂאֵי, with the Qal participle of נָשָׂא, a verb which differs only slightly from נָשָׂא, “to beguile” (e.g., Gen 3:13). This same slight difference in pronunciation between “s” (שׁ or ס) and “sh” (שׁ) will also be the key element in the incident with שְׂבַלָּת versus סְבַלָּת in Judg 12:5–6. Both stories occurred in Ephraim or its immediate vicinity.²⁴

3:19–26 The syntax of *waw* prefixed to a proper noun or personal pronoun preceding a perfect verb signals a clause that is circumstantial or parenthetical (Joüon, § 155 nc). Such clauses in 3:19 (וַיְהִי־אֵשֶׁר); 3:20 (וַיִּזְדַּקֵּן); 3:24 (וַיְהִי־יָצֵא); and 3:26 (וַיִּזְדַּקֵּן) all have Ehud as the stated or implied subject. They help divide the scene into discrete parts. In 3:18–19, Ehud made sure he was alone with the king; in 3:20–23, he maneuvered the king into a vulnerable position and then assassinated him; in 3:24–25, the focus turned to the king’s servants; and 3:26 reported Ehud’s successful escape.²⁵

3:19 מִן־הַפְּסִילִים אֲשֶׁר אֶת־הַגִּלְגָּל—The noun פְּסִיל, from the verb פָּסַל, is the typical term for idols carved from stone (e.g., Deut 7:5, 25; 12:3; Is 30:22; 42:8). The synonym אֲבָנִים will occur in Judg 17:3–4; 18:14–31. Joshua earlier erected uncut “stones” (אֲבָנִים) as a memorial at Gilgal, commemorating Israel’s entry into the land (Josh 4:1–9). Translations render אֲבָנִים here as “stone idols” (AAT, GW), “sculptured stones” (NAB, RSV, NRSV), “carved stones” (CEB; similarly, NEB), “carved images” (EHV, HCSB, NET), or “idols” (NASB, NJB). KJV referred to the area as “the quarries.” JPS transliterates with “Pesilim.” Perhaps these sculptured stones were located at a sacred site due to its proximity to Gilgal (Josh 4:20). The presence of idols there would not be surprising in view of Israel’s apostasy referred to in Judg 3:12.

In the relative clause אֲשֶׁר אֶת־הַגִּלְגָּל, the term אֶת־ is the preposition “with,” indicating proximity. The combination אֶת־אֲשֶׁר is often used to describe a site, as again in 4:13 (BDB, אֶת־ II, 2).

דְּבַר־סֵתֶר—Block rightly observes that the construct phrase דְּבַר־סֵתֶר is “delightfully ambiguous.”²⁶ דְּבַר־ can mean “word” or “message,” but it can also mean “thing,” “object,” or even “experience.” Eglon seems to have interpreted the phrase in its most basic sense as “a secret word.” Perhaps he expected Ehud dutifully to report some uprising against him in Israel. He might have anticipated a divine word given to Ehud by the

²³ CSSC, OT, 163.

²⁴ Schneider, *Judges*, 50.

²⁵ Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 176.

²⁶ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 165.

idols in Gilgal, since Ehud had returned by way of them. If so, then Eglon would have interpreted “God” in 3:20 to refer to these false “gods.” If Eglon took it as “a secret thing,” he might have thought that Ehud returned to present him with additional gifts. However, Ehud intended a more deadly “thing” (hidden under his clothing) and a more humiliating “experience” for Eglon.²⁷

לְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ—The preposition לְ is used in the sense of possession, “I have,” whereas לְּ indicates the recipient, “for you.”

וַיִּצְאֵהוּ מִלְּפָנָיו כָּל־הַעַמְדִּים עִלָּיו:—It is possible that Ehud continues to be the speaker here and utters וַיִּצְאֵהוּ, but most likely a change of subject is implied and the king is the subject of וַיִּצְאֵהוּ. The interjection וַיִּצְאֵהוּ, “hush! be silent” (*DCH*; cf. the verb הִקְטִיף, “be silent”) can describe the awed and humble silence Yahweh’s worshipers were to maintain in his presence (Hab 2:20; Zeph 1:7; Zech 2:17). Other occurrences point to the admonition “be still, hush” (Amos 6:10; 8:3; Neh 8:11). Since the king’s officials “went out” (וַיִּצְאֵהוּ), they interpreted Eglon’s word וַיִּצְאֵהוּ as a command to leave the room, affording Ehud additional time and privacy for what he was about to do.

The LXX supplies “Eglon” as the subject of וַיִּצְאֵהוּ, but that has provoked debate. LXX^A reads εἶπεν Εγλωμ πᾶσιν ἐκ μέσου· καὶ ἐξῆλθον ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ πάντες οἱ παραστήκοντες αὐτῷ, “Eglon said to all from the midst, and all those who were standing around him went out from him.” LXX^B, with Codex Ephraemi Syri Rescriptus and Aquila, reads εἶπεν Εγλωμ πρὸς αὐτόν σιώπα· καὶ ἐξῆλθεστέλιεν ἀφ’ ἑαυτοῦ πάντας τοὺς ἐφεστῶτας ἐπ’ αὐτόν, “Eglon said to him, ‘Be silent.’ And he sent out from himself all those waiting on him.” The reading of LXX^B limits Eglon’s injunction to “be silent” to Ehud, rather than a general call for silence directed to everyone, including the officials. It also leads some to emend the Qal וַיִּצְאֵהוּ to a Hiphil form of וַיִּצְאֵהוּ, such as וַיִּצְאֵהוּ, “and he caused them to leave.”²⁸

3:20 The two clauses with a fronted subject noun or pronoun, וַיִּצְאֵהוּ and then וַיִּצְאֵהוּ, contrast a change of subject. The second such clause, וַיִּצְאֵהוּ, referring to Eglon, is another circumstantial, scene-setting clause, “now he was sitting . . .,” between clauses with Ehud as the main subject of the action.

וַיִּצְאֵהוּ אֶל־מֶלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר־בְּעִלְיָה—By approaching the king, Ehud cleverly maneuvered Eglon into an even more vulnerable position.²⁹

בְּעִלְיָה הַמְּקַרְרָה—The noun עִלְיָה means “upper chamber, roof chamber” (*DCH*, עִלְיָה I, 1); it recurs in 3:23–25. The noun מְקַרְרָה, “coolness,” occurs elsewhere only in 3:24 and is derived from the verb קָרַר, “be cold.” *DCH*, מְקַרְרָה, also suggests the meaning “summer palace.” The construct phrase literally means “in an upper room of coolness,” and it has been translated similarly in most English versions and understood that way by most commentators.³⁰ The LXX reads ἐν τῷ ὑπερώῳ τῷ θερῖνῳ

²⁷ Brown, *Judges*, 167. See Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, 37.

²⁸ Butler, *Judges*, 54.

²⁹ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 37–41.

³⁰ The construct phrase עִלְיָה הַמְּקַרְרָה is translated as “summer parlour” (KJV); “cool roof chamber” (ESV, RSV, NRSV, NASB); “cool room on the roof” (AAT); “cool second-story room” (CEB); “cool upper chamber” (EHV, JPS); “cool upper room” (NAB).

αὐτοῦ, “in his upstairs summer room.” Halpern cites the plural of the noun עֲלֵיָהּ along with the Piel participle מְקַרְהָ in Ps 104:3: God “lays the beams of his upper chambers on the waters.” He suggests that בַּעֲלֵי־יָתִיּוֹת הַמְּקַרְהָ in Judg 3:20 refers to the “room over the beams,” a raised throne room.³¹ Ehud would have presented his tribute at the bottom of a set of stairs while the king was seated in the “room over the beams.” When Eglon commanded, “Quiet!” his courtiers left the throne room, allowing Ehud to step up to the raised throne room to be alone with the king. At one end of this “room over the beams,” there may have been a bathroom, which would explain the later actions of the courtiers.³²

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶהוּד דְּבַר־אֱלֹהִים לִי אֵלַיךְ—Ehud repeated his announcement from 3:19 but made it more tantalizing to the king with the clever adjustment of a single word. “I have a secret message/thing for you” becomes “I have a message of/from God for you.”³³ Ehud used the generic name אֱלֹהִים, “God,” rather than Israel’s covenant name for God, יְהוָה, “Yahweh.” Elsewhere דְּבַר (ה) אֱלֹהִים refers to a prophetic oracle (e.g., 1 Sam 9:27; 2 Sam 16:23; 1 Ki 12:22; 1 Chr 17:3; see also the similar phrases in 2 Ki 14:25; Is 40:8). In 1 Chr 26:32, the phrase לְכָל־דְּבַר הָאֱלֹהִים refers to “all matters pertaining to God.” Ehud could truthfully say that his mission was authorized by the “God” of Israel, but Eglon may well have understood אֱלֹהִים to mean “gods.” Ehud had just returned to him by way of the הַפְּסִילִים, and Eglon may have hoped those deities had given Ehud a divine oracle for him.

וַיִּקַּם מֵעַל הַכִּסֵּא—The article with a noun can have the force of a pronominal suffix, thus, הַכִּסֵּא could be rendered as “his throne” (Joüon, § 137 f (2)). The LXX reads καὶ ἐξᾶνέσθη ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου Εγλωμ ἐγγὺς αὐτοῦ, “and Eglon rose up from his throne near him.” This relieves the subject ambiguity of the Hebrew. “Near him” would apparently modify the throne, “but this would require ‘him’ to refer to Ehud or be an obvious tautology.”³⁴

3:21 וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶהוּד אֶת־יָדוֹ שְׂמֹאלוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הַחֶרֶב מֵעַל יָרֵךְ יָמִינוֹ—LXX^B adds at the front of the sentence καὶ ἐγένετο ὅμα τῷ ἀναστῆναι αὐτόν, “and it came to pass at the same time he rose” (LXX^A is similar).³⁵

וַיִּתְקַעָהּ בְּבִטְנוֹ—The subject and the referent of the pronominal suffix on בְּבִטְנוֹ are not explicit in the MT, but the last named subject was Ehud. LXX^A made the referent of the pronoun explicit: εἰς τὴν κοιλίαν Εγλωμ, Ehud plunged his sword “into Eglon’s belly.” The verb תִּקַּע means “to thrust, drive, plunge” a weapon into (בָּ) a person (see BDB, Qal, 1) or to blow an instrument (e.g., 3:27; 6:34). A graphic term, it occurs also in the next account, describing Jael’s tent peg penetrating Sisera’s skull (4:21).

³¹ Halpern, *The First Historians*, 45–46; Halpern cites Moshe Garsiel, “The Ehud Ben-Gura Episode (Judges 3:12–30),” in *Sepher Ron* (Tel Aviv: Don, 1974), 61–62.

³² Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 165–66; Schneider, *Judges*, 50; Halpern, *The First Historians*, 43–58.

³³ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 166.

³⁴ Butler, *Judges*, 54.

³⁵ Butler, *Judges*, 54.

3:22 וַיִּבֹא גַם־הַחֶבֶב אַחַר הַלְּחָב—The noun חֶבֶב, “sword” (3:21), is feminine, as indicated by the feminine suffix on the verb וַיִּתְקַטֵּף (3:21), but the verb וַיִּבֹא is masculine. Both of the following nouns in this clause are masculine. The syntax can be rendered literally as “it [the sword] went in—even/also the hilt after the blade.” The noun חֶבֶב I occurs only here and refers to the “hilt” of a sword (*DCH*). The noun לֶחֶב usually refers to a “flame” of fire; only here does it refer to the “blade” of a sword (*DCH*, 3). If Ehud’s sword was the Naue Type II variety, it would have had no cross guard, explaining how the hilt could have entered after the blade.³⁶

וַיִּסְגֵּר הַחֶלֶב בְּעַד הַלְּחָב—The verb סָגַר with the preposition בְּעַד means “to shut/close behind/upon,” as again in 3:23; 9:51. See also the second textual note on 3:23. The subject is חֶלֶב. Assuming Eglon was obese (בְּרִיא מְאֹד, 3:17), Amit suggests that Ehud was able to complete a “clean murder.”³⁷ His fatness would have enabled Ehud to commit the act while avoiding a mess and arousing suspicion that could have led to his capture. Note the assonance between חֶלֶב and חֶבֶב.

כִּי לֹא שָׁלַף הַחֶרֶב מִבֶּטְנוֹ—A causal clause, explaining why the sword remained deep in his belly and perhaps also how Ehud avoided shedding much incriminating blood. A non-retracted sword without a blood-letting groove might “plug the hole,” so to speak, especially in a very large man, to prevent immediate external bleeding. שָׁלַף is used with חָרַב, “to draw the sword,” also in Judg 8:10, 20; 9:54; 20:2, 15, 17, 25, 35, 46. Here the sword is already in Eglon’s belly, so the nuance of שָׁלַף is to “withdraw” it.

וַיֵּצֵא הַפְּרָשָׁה—The word פְּרָשָׁה with the article and a directional *he* suffix. It occurs in the OT only here and probably means “excrement” (*DCH*, פְּרָשָׁה I). The noun פְּרָשָׁה occurs elsewhere and denotes “intestines” or “excrement, dung” (*DCH*, פְּרָשָׁה I, 1–2). LXX^A does not include the final sentence, which demonstrates, as Lindars notes, that LXX^A often “omits untranslatable words in Judges.”³⁸ LXX^B says καὶ ἐξῆλθεν Αωδ τὴν προστάδα, “and Ehud went out to the porch.”

KJV, RSV, and NRSV translate the clause as “the dirt came out,” taking the meaning of פְּרָשָׁה to be “excrement.” See also “the filth came out” (JPS); “Eglon’s insides came out” (HCSB); “the contents of his bowels came out” (EHV); “the dung came out” (ESV); “the refuse came out” (NASB). AAT translates with “it [the sword] came out behind,” and NEB has “[Ehud] left it [the sword] protruding behind.” NAB, NET, and NJB do not translate the line. “The text may represent a type of coarse humor that later versions did not understand or tried to hide.”³⁹ Barré understands this as a reference to Eglon’s excrement coming out of the wound and seeks to circumvent these difficulties by relating the term to an Akkadian cognate (*naparsudu*), suggesting that the final *he* is due to morphological assimilation to הַמִּסְדֵּרִינָה in 3:23a.⁴⁰ Others take “feces” as the

³⁶ Stone, “Eglon’s Belly and Ehud’s Blade,” 662.

³⁷ Amit, “The Story of Ehud (Judges 3:12–30),” 113.

³⁸ Lindars, *Judges 1–5*, 148; see also Barré, “The Meaning of *pršdn* in Judges iii 22.”

³⁹ Butler, *Judges*, 54. Lessing and Steinmann, *Prepare the Way of the Lord*, 171: “Crude as they are, these details are significant to the plot line. Eglon’s death is a literary lampoon against one of Israel’s most hated enemies—Moab.”

⁴⁰ Barré, “The Meaning of *pršdn* in Judges iii 22,” 2–11.

implied subject of וַיֵּצֵא, and הַפֶּרֶשׁ שְׂדֵנָה as “at the anus” (see *HALOT*, פֶּרֶשׁ, and *DCH*, הַפֶּרֶשׁ שְׂדֵנָה II).⁴¹ Following Jewish Targums and in view of all the alternatives, it seems best to understand הַפֶּרֶשׁ שְׂדֵנָה as a term for excrement.⁴²

As briefly noted in the second textual note on 3:17, some understand הַפֶּרֶשׁ שְׂדֵנָה to mean “to the king’s back” and take הַחֶבֶד in the preceding clause, the “sword,” as the subject. But the verb וַיֵּצֵא, “went out,” is masculine, while הַחֶבֶד, “sword,” is feminine. As Chisholm points out, it would be better, if one sees this clause “as referring to the sword going out the king’s back, to understand the masculine noun לֶחֶב, ‘blade,’ as the subject of the verb.” Another possibility “is that Ehud buried the sword inside the king vertically.” A blow to the lower abdomen, “to kill a victim quickly and quietly, would have to sever the aorta.” Further, the blade would have to have traveled at a sharp upward angle.⁴³

3:23 הַמִּסְדָּרֹנָה—The noun הַמִּסְדָּרֹנָה is another hapax, with the article and directional *he* ending: מִסְדָּרוֹן, “porch,” “vestibule,” or perhaps “lavatory” (see *HALOT* and *DCH*). In the context of Ehud’s escape, it is rendered in the translation above as “colonnaded portico.” LXX^A has προστώδα, “porch.” LXX^B has διατεταγμένους, “appointed place.” Many English translations have “porch” (AAT, CEB, ESV, HCSB, JB, KJV, NAB, NEB, NIV). Some translations have “vestibule” (EHV, JPS, NASB, NET, NRSV, RSV). Kraeling said that this “must mean a platform with pillars.”⁴⁴

וַיִּסְגֹּר דְלָתוֹת הָעֲלִיָּה בַעֲדוֹ וַיִּנְעֵל—The verb סָגַר was used with בַּעֲדוֹ in 3:22 (see the second textual note there). In five of the ten instances of סָגַר, “to close, shut,” with the preposition בַּעֲדוֹ, “behind, after,” the word “door” appears after the verb and בַּעֲדוֹ introduces the object that is “shut in” (also 2 Ki 4:4–5, 33; Is 26:20), which may suggest that Ehud locked the doors from the inside (see the next paragraph). For the noun עֲלִיָּה, “upper chamber,” see the third textual note on 3:20. נִנְעֵל is the pausal form of the perfect verb נָעַל, “lock, bolt” (*DCH*, נָעַל I, Qal, 1). The Qal passive participle נִנְעָלוֹת in 3:24 will refer to the doors as “bolted, locked.” Instead of a conjunctive *waw* and a perfect verb, the expected form for the next action in a narrative sequence would have been an imperfect *waw* consecutive (Joüon, § 119 z). As Chisholm notes, the construction here with an imperfect *waw* consecutive (וַיִּסְגֹּר) followed by a perfect with conjunctive *waw* (וַיִּנְעֵל) is complementary: shutting and then locking the doors are actions typically done together. The construction may “indicate the climactic act in the sequence and signal a transition in focus.”⁴⁵ After stabbing the king, Ehud apparently bolted the door of the inner chamber, causing the king’s attendants to conclude that he was occupied with a

⁴¹ Cf. Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 185; Mobley, *The Empty Men*, 81–84; O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 93; Barré, “The Meaning of *pršdn* in Judges iii 22,” 2–6. See also the discussion in *BHQ*, 50*.

⁴² Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 168.

⁴³ Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 185–86, citing Stone, “Eglon’s Belly and Ehud’s Blade,” 659, for the last two sentences.

⁴⁴ Kraeling, “Difficulties in the Story of Ehud,” 208.

⁴⁵ Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 177, note 11.

private matter. It also bought Ehud more time: by the time the king's attendants realized the king was in trouble, Ehud had escaped.

If *הַמִּסְדֵּר הַזֶּה* was a porch or vestibule, it is possible that Ehud may have locked the door *from the outside* and exited the compound at the same place he had entered. But if *הַמִּסְדֵּר הַזֶּה*, from a different root *סדר*, indicates a colonnade or veranda, Ehud may have locked the door to the king's inner chamber *from the inside* and escaped over the side of a wall or into a garden.⁴⁶ In 2 Ki 4:4–5, 33 and Is 26:20, “closing the door behind” refers to locking oneself inside the room.

Commentary

1315 BC

The physical abnormality Ehud suffered, which appeared to equip him for only one role—conveyer of the tribute—also uniquely equipped him for another role: assassin. Ehud murdered Eglon using a weapon made purposely to be concealed. The dagger was short enough to hide under his clothing, long enough to enable Ehud to complete the attack without having to get too close to his victim, and doubled-edged to be deadly with a single, quick thrust.⁴⁷

Saying that Ehud was left-handed may indicate that left-handedness was considered peculiar and unnatural, even deceptive and evil (as in the Latin term for left-handed, “sinister”).⁴⁸ More literally, the Hebrew states that he was “restricted in his right hand” (3:15), probably meaning that Ehud had a physical deformity in his right hand.⁴⁹ Soggin maintains that in this context “everything is in favor of a real physical defect, of a kind that would seriously diminish the capability of a fighting man and make him seem to be harmless.” This helps to explain how Ehud could have been admitted into the presence of the king without any search or precautionary measures.⁵⁰ The same phrase is used to describe seven hundred left-handed slingers, also from the tribe of Benjamin, “who could sling a stone at a single hair and not miss” (20:16). This was “a specially trained group for whom dexterity with the left hand was inculcated by

⁴⁶ See Boling, *Judges*, 87; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 167.

⁴⁷ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 39.

⁴⁸ Boling, *Judges*, 86; Enns, *Judges*, 47; Auld, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, 149.

⁴⁹ See the fourth textual note on 3:15.

⁵⁰ Soggin, *Judges*, 50. Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 181, disagreed, insisting that the phrase “cannot refer to an actual impediment or physical defect. . . . The seven hundred Benjamite slingers described in 20:16 as ‘bound in the right hand’ were not handicapped!” Chisholm takes it as “an idiom reflecting how these men differed from the norm—they were left-handed”; so also Halpern, *The First Historians*, 40–43. King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 234, explain that “for greater security, entry through the outer gate to the inner gate was gained by a dogleg right turn. In this way besiegers carrying the shield in the left hand were exposed to assaults from the defenders of the city.” But left-handed warriors would be able to carry their shields in their right hand, allowing them to protect themselves more readily from attackers on the city wall.

binding up the right hand. In line combat, trained left-handers have a decided advantage over right-handers who are taught to fight sword against shield.”⁵¹

Though “restricted in his right hand,” Ehud was resourceful and quick-witted. In fact, there is something “sinister” about how he plotted his attack on Eglon. Ehud showed boldness and guile when he induced Eglon and maneuvered him into a vulnerable position. Eglon was apparently sitting in a chamber adjoining the audience hall. When dismissed (3:19), the attendants went to an outer room adjoining the audience hall. Ehud then entered the chamber where the king was sitting.⁵²

The noun for “tribute” is frequently used elsewhere to designate an “offering” of grain or animals made to God (e.g., Gen 4:3–5; Lev 2:1, 4, 13–15; 23:16). Wood explains that “it was normally required that the person bringing it [the tribute] be important among his people. The king who imposed the tribute was made to feel more important when a leader was forced to humble himself in bringing it personally.” Thus Ehud must have “already attained a high position before the story begins.” He was received and even honored by Eglon and would soon be given a private audience with the king.⁵³

The initial clause in 3:16 involves a flashback. According to Chisholm:

At the end of [3:]15 we are told that the Israelites sent their tribute to Eglon by the hand of Ehud. [Judg 3:]17a informs us that Ehud then brought the tribute to the king. However, [3:]16a flashes back to a time when Ehud made the sword, presumably before he was actually sent off with the tribute. The chronological order of events was probably as follows: (1) Ehud made his sword ([3:]16a); (2) the Israelites sent Ehud to the king ([3:]15c); (3) Ehud strapped on his sword ([3:]16c); (4) Ehud brought the tribute to the king ([3:]17a). The text presents the first two actions in reverse order, perhaps for literary effect. The references to making and strapping on the sword naturally complement each other and, when combined, facilitate the presentation of Ehud as a man who is on a different mission (assassinating the king) than the one he appears to be on (delivering tribute to the king). By reversing the verb order, the narrator creates a structure in which the secret mission is embedded within the ostensible mission: (A) Israel sends Ehud to deliver tribute, (B) Ehud makes a murder weapon, (B') Ehud straps on the murder weapon, (A') Ehud arrives with the tribute.⁵⁴

We already suspect what Ehud intends to do, and we assume that his left-handedness will help him. But how will he get the king isolated, and then how will he escape? Eglon was no longer an agile warrior,⁵⁵ but if the phrase rendered as “a very fat man” (3:17) instead indicates that Eglon was healthy and

⁵¹ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 160–61.

⁵² Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 183; see Halpern, *The First Historians*, 45–46, 52–54. 2 Samuel 13 and 1 Kings 1 appear to depict similar three-part architectural structures.

⁵³ Wood, *The Distressing Days of the Judges*, 173, 175.

⁵⁴ Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 174, note 2.

⁵⁵ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 39; Amit, *Judges*, 184.

strong,⁵⁶ it highlights Ehud's courage and daring.⁵⁷ Then Eglon's name would not have had a pejorative connotation, nor would it have been suggestive of being fattened for slaughter.⁵⁸ Being called "very fat" created further negative connotations, such as a lack of mobility, an unsuspecting nature, and greed at having fattened himself at Israel's expense, as well as naivete and stupidity regarding what was about to happen.⁵⁹ Elsewhere, the term for "fat" (בָּרִיאַ) usually refers to animals that were well-fed and physically healthy, often in contrast to undernourished and thin animals (see Gen 41:2, 4–5, 7, 18, 20; 1 Ki 5:3 [ET 4:23]; Ezek 34:3; Zech 11:16). The term is used of people in only two other contexts. In Ps 73:4, it describes well-nourished rich people,⁶⁰ and in Dan 1:15, it is used of Daniel and his friends, who, despite their restricted diet, looked healthy and well-fed after the ten-day experiment.⁶¹ In Hab 1:16, the word describes abundant food. Considered by itself, the term does not necessarily suggest that Eglon was obese, but the description in 3:22, which has an additional term for "fat" (חֵלֶב), suggests that he was. So also does a subtle wordplay. The Moabite king's name, "Eglon" (עֵגְלוֹן), evokes the term for a "calf, young bull" (עֵגֶל) as well as the adjective "round, rotund" (עָגֹל). Eglon is thus like a fattened calf, primed for slaughter.⁶²

Eglon's palace appears to have consisted of two parts, an outer chamber (used, perhaps, as a reception room) and an inner chamber where the king normally sat, "the cool upper chamber" (3:20). The term in 3:23, where Ehud escaped, is rendered as "the colonnaded portico" (הַמְּסֻדָּה הַיְנֻדָּה). Alternately, it may have been an opening in the inner chamber through which Ehud exited.⁶³

That Eglon "rose from the throne" (3:20) and stood up "is very important in light of the disproportion between Ehud's small dagger and the king's great girth. The king's belly, stretched taut when he stood up, enabled Ehud to exploit the advantages of his small, two-edged dagger."⁶⁴ Ehud also left himself an escape route if Eglon did not respond as expected. As Amit suggests, "if during the first stage the king had not sent away his attendants [3:19], or if in the second stage he would not have risen from his chair, Ehud could have withdrawn from his original plan and sufficed with some sort of oracular saying or

⁵⁶ See the second textual note on 3:17.

⁵⁷ Stone, "Eglon's Belly and Ehud's Blade," 654–57, 663.

⁵⁸ Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 183.

⁵⁹ Soggin, *Judges*, 50; Schneider, *Judges*, 49; Younger, *Judges and Ruth*, 117.

⁶⁰ Brug, *Psalms 73–150*, 12.

⁶¹ Steinmann, *Daniel*, 97.

⁶² See also the second textual note on 3:12 and the discussion of wordplay in "Narrative and Literary Analysis" in "Written for Our Instruction" in the introduction.

⁶³ Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 186: "Like the noun at the end of [3:22], it [הַמְּסֻדָּה הַיְנֻדָּה] has the prefixed article and the directive ending, suggesting it is an architectural term describing the area into which Ehud moved when he left the room."

⁶⁴ Amit, *Judges*, 187.

fictitious secret.”⁶⁵ But Eglon suspected nothing. Chisholm describes the actual outcome: “On the contrary he was vulnerable and, by standing, had made himself a well-positioned target for a quick sword thrust!”⁶⁶

Jull suggested that Ehud murdered Eglon while the king was defecating in his private toilet. In this view, the king stood up because he was shocked that Ehud would invade his private space.⁶⁷ It seems unlikely, however, as Chisholm maintains, “that Ehud would risk startling the king in this way when split seconds counted so much.” In addition, while the murder took place in the king’s “upper chamber,” a private room (“which was his alone,” 3:20), “this may be distinct from a toilet located within it.” Eglon’s servants may have *thought* the king was in or on the toilet (3:24), “but the text gives no evidence that this was the case.” When Ehud approached, Eglon rose from “the throne” (כִּסֵּא, 3:20), “which most naturally refers to a royal throne within the private room, not a toilet.”⁶⁸ When the servants opened the door to the private room, they immediately saw the king lying on the floor (3:25). This would have been unlikely if Ehud had murdered the king on the toilet.⁶⁹ Halpern believes the toilet was not a separate room within the king’s chamber and therefore the king would have needed to close the chamber doors when using the toilet facility, explaining in part the servants’ assumption that he was relieving himself (3:24).⁷⁰

Alter suggests that there may also have been “a deliberate sexual nuance in the ‘secret thing’ [3:19] Ehud brings to Eglon, in the way the two are locked together alone in a chamber, and in the sudden opening of locked entries at the conclusion of the story [3:25].”⁷¹ Miller maintains that “the sexual theme is carried forward with the thinnest of disguises, except that it is Eglon, the Moabite, who is portrayed as the homosexual, and it is the Benjamite Ehud who gains the better of him by pretending to offer a homosexual liaison.” Miller conjectures that “by sending on the men carrying the tribute, Ehud is telling Eglon that he wants to see him in private” for this homosexual encounter. “Eglon obviously gets the message because he dismisses his retinue and takes Ehud upstairs to a private room. It is hardly plausible that a king would agree to such an inappropriate meeting with a vassal without his retinue present, unless the purpose of the meeting were something that the king would want to do in private.”⁷² Younger, however, dismisses this interpretation, saying that “most of these so-called

⁶⁵ Amit, *Judges*, 188–89.

⁶⁶ Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 185; see Handy, “Uneasy Laughter: Ehud and Eglon as Ethnic Humor,” 237.

⁶⁷ Jull, “מִקְרֵהוּ in Judges 3: A Scatological Reading,” 70.

⁶⁸ Elsewhere in the OT, the noun כִּסֵּא refers to a throne or seat of honor and never to a toilet (despite the modern English slang usage of “throne”).

⁶⁹ Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 184, note 35.

⁷⁰ Halpern, *The First Historians*, 45–46.

⁷¹ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 39; see also Gunn, *Judges*, 51; Niditch, *Judges*, 57–58.

⁷² Miller, “Verbal Feud in the Hebrew Bible,” 114–15.

sexual innuendos can be easily and more properly explained in the context of the scatological overtones (which are clearly present).⁷³

Following the conjecture that the term translated as “to the colonnaded portico” in 3:23 (הַמְסֻדָּרֵי הַיּוֹנָה) stands for another opening in the throne room, perhaps in the floor or at the rear, and linking this to an Arabic word *sadira*, “to be blinded, puzzled,” Halpern proposed that this is a euphemistic expression, “a place of concealment,” for the king’s toilet. For this reason, Halpern argued that the statement that Ehud “went out הִסְדִּירָהּ, shut the doors of the upper chamber behind him” must refer to Ehud locking himself inside the king’s chamber, meaning that he would have had to escape through a window, back door, or latrine. However, in other occurrences of “shut behind” (סָדַר plus בְּעַד), the statement is preceded by a reference to the subject entering the room. When one closes a door after entering a room, one shuts himself in the room. But 3:23 appears to be unique: the statement is preceded by the statement that Ehud “went out” (יָצָא). Halpern takes “he closed” (הִסְדִּירָהּ) as a flashback, “he had closed” (before leaving through the latrine).⁷⁴ Although possible, it is not the most natural way of explaining the Hebrew verb sequence (with imperfect *waw* consecutives: וַיִּסְדֵּר . . . יָצָא).⁷⁵ Ehud would have had to slide down the toilet opening in the floor to a cellar below Eglon’s throne room, where he may have emerged on the ground level and exited the compound without arousing attention. This scenario would be in keeping with other scatological elements in the story.⁷⁶

While Halpern pictures it that Ehud locked himself into Eglon’s chamber from the inside, King and Stager assume that Ehud locked the door from the outside. They believe that the lock was a tumbler lock, and they provide a detailed description of the locking mechanism:

A wooden box containing loose pins was attached to the inside of the door above the wooden bolt, or lock case, into which the pins drop when the bar is moved to locked position. To unlock the door the key is inserted into a slot in the bolt until the matching teeth of the key push up the movable pins so that the sliding bolt can be drawn. When the key is withdrawn, the bolt can be secured by sliding it horizontally into a position in which the pins drop from the box into the slots of the bolt. To make the tumbler locks more difficult to pick, they were mounted on the inside of the door and reached by passing one’s hand and key through the hole in the door.⁷⁷

Regarding Ehud’s escape:

⁷³ Younger, *Judges and Ruth*, 119, note 30.

⁷⁴ Halpern, *The First Historians*, 56–58.

⁷⁵ Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 186–88.

⁷⁶ Halpern, *The First Historians*, 58; Halpern, “The Assassination of Eglon: The First Locked-Room Murder Mystery,” 40–41.

⁷⁷ King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 31–32.

By putting his hand through the keyhole in the door, Ehud could have slid the bolt of the tumbler lock into place from outside. The servants, then, would have had to fetch the key to unlock the doors.⁷⁸

King and Stager include a drawing showing the construction of such a tumbler lock and how a key was inserted to unlock it. Ehud would not have needed a key to lock the door as he left, but the servants would have needed a key to unlock it in order to get in. This seems to fit the circumstances here, that Ehud did not need to fetch a key before he locked the door.⁷⁹

Once Ehud passed by the carved stone images on his return from his final visit with Eglon (3:26; the same carved idols were in 3:19), he was on safe ground. Perhaps these stones were carved worship objects for Moabite gods, but for Ehud, they marked the limits of the of territory under Moabite control.⁸⁰ Eglon, however, may have understood Ehud as having received a “secret message” (3:19) “from the gods” (3:20) for him from one of the Moabite deities, which he thought Ehud could have obtained from an oracle located at or near the carved stones. Ehud’s returning from these stones (3:19) “may well have been deliberately intended to deceive Eglon into thinking that he had returned with an oracle.”⁸¹ Thus “Ehud may have used Eglon’s pagan misconceptions to undermine him.”⁸²

The abundance of details about the stabbing of the king and his resulting disembowelment, incontinence, and death are a departure from the usually terse style of the Hebrew Bible. Eglon was tempted by the “secret word/thing” (3:19) that he thought he was about to receive, but he also acted imprudently. He recklessly dismissed his own bodyguards and rose to receive the message.⁸³

Ehud was a gift from Yahweh to his oppressed people, who were crying out in their need (3:15). One interpreter opines: “The silence of Yahweh and the focus on the tactics of the deliverer raise serious doubts concerning Ehud’s own sense of place in the divine scheme. In fact, the bulk of the narrative is devoted not to describing God’s actions but to narrating the achievements of the agent whom God has called to rescue the Israelites from the Moabite oppression.”⁸⁴ Yet another maintains that “this silence, rather than suggesting divine disapproval, may emphasize that human initiative, when coupled with faith, is not necessarily antithetical to God’s program. Ehud seized the opportunity that his appointment as tribute-bearer offered and put his faith into action.”⁸⁵

⁷⁸ King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 32–33.

⁷⁹ King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 33; see also Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 188, note 40; Halpern, *The First Historians*, 45.

⁸⁰ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 163–65.

⁸¹ Webb, *Judges*, 172–73.

⁸² Younger, *Judges and Ruth*, 117.

⁸³ Webb, *Judges*, 165–66.

⁸⁴ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 160.

⁸⁵ Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 182–83.

Josephus wrote that Ehud told Eglon that he had received a dream from God to give to Eglon, “upon which the king leaped out of his throne for joy of the dream.”⁸⁶ *Ruth Rabbah* 2:9 states: “The Holy One said that because Eglon honored God by rising from his throne, his descendant [Solomon] will sit upon the throne of God.”⁸⁷ Another Jewish tradition held that the Moabitess Ruth⁸⁸ was Eglon’s daughter.⁸⁹ Keil also upheld that King Eglon rose from his seat, not to defend himself, but “from reverence towards the word of God.”⁹⁰ Such conjectures are highly fanciful and have no textual support.

Luther, in *On War Against the Turk*, wrote:

It has often happened, indeed, it usually happens, that God bestows good fortune and success upon a whole land and kingdom through one single man; just as on the other hand he brings a whole land into all sorts of distress and misery through one scoundrel at court, as Solomon says in Ecclesiastes [9:18], “One sinner destroys much good.”

We read of Naaman, the captain of the king of Syria, that through this one man God gave the whole land good fortune and success [2 Ki 5:1–27]. Through the holy Joseph, God gave good fortune to the whole kingdom of Egypt [Gen 39:5], and in II Kings [3:14] Elisha says to Jehoram, “Were it not that I have regard for Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would neither look at you nor see you.” Thus the godless kings of Israel and Edom had to be helped for the sake of one godly man, when otherwise they would have been ruined in all kinds of distress. And in the book of Judges one can see the good that God did through Ehud [3:15–30], Gideon [6:11–8:28], Deborah [4:4–5:31], Samson [13:2–16:31], and other individuals, though the people were not worthy of it. ...

I say this so that we will not be frightened or moved in any way if the great majority who fight under the emperor’s banner are unbelieving and have an un-Christian mind. We must also remember that Abraham, all by himself, was able to do much—Genesis 14 [Gen 14:14–17; 18:24–33]. ... In I Samuel 14 [1 Sam 14:6], the godly Jonathan said, “Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving by many or by few,” and he himself inflicted a great slaughter on the Philistines such as Saul with his whole army could not do. It does not matter, then, if the entire crowd is not good, provided only that the head and some of the chief men are upright. Of course, it would be good if all were upright, but that is scarcely possible.⁹¹

⁸⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 5.193 (Whiston, *The Works of Josephus*, 139).

⁸⁷ In A. J. Rosenberg, ed., *Judges: A New Translation of Text, Rashi, and Commentary* (trans. Avraham Fishelis and Shmuel Fishelis; New York: Judaica, 1983), 23, cited by Smit, *Judges*, 72.

⁸⁸ Ruth was an ancestress of David and Solomon and ultimately of Jesus Christ (Ruth 4:13–22; Mt 1:5–6).

⁸⁹ Gunn, *Judges*, 35.

⁹⁰ Keil, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, 297. Edersheim, *Old Testament Bible History*, 3:117, agreed that Eglon rose from his seat as a “token of reverence.” Edersheim added in a footnote: “It was common in antiquity to rise when receiving a direct message from the king. This is the origin of the liturgical practice of rising when the Gospel is read.”

⁹¹ Luther, *On War Against the Turk*, 1529 (AE 46:192–93).