

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Twenty-Third Week - Tuesday

EHUD AND EGLON

"So the children of Israel served Eglon king of Moab eighteen years. But when the children of Israel cried out to Yahweh, Yahweh raised up a deliverer for them: Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man. By him the children of Israel sent tribute to Eglon king of Moab. Now Ehud made himself a dagger (it was double-edged and a cubit in length) and fastened it under his clothes on his right thigh. So he brought the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. (Now Eglon was a very fat man.) And when he had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who had carried the tribute. But he himself turned back from the stone images that were at Gilgal, and said, 'I have a secret message for you, O king.' He said, 'Keep silence!' And all who attended him went out from him. So Ehud came to him (now he was sitting upstairs in his cool private chamber). Then Ehud said, 'I have a message from God for you.' So he arose from his seat. Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly" (Judges 3:14-21).

The word rendered "left-handed" signifies "short" or "obstructed in the *right* hand." This being the true meaning, it is erroneous to suppose that the seven hundred left-handed men of Benjamin (Judg. 20:16) were ambidextrous, that is, could use both hands equally well. It is more than this. It is a bold and noble triumph over infirmity, turning a disability into a gain, cultivating the powers of the weaker left hand to the extent of making it more skillful than the right hand of other men.

One of this body of left-handed Benjamites was Ehud, the second judge of Israel. He was the person appointed to command the party that carried the tribute of Israel to king Eglon at the city of Palm-trees. It is well to note that this city of Palm-trees, with the whole plain of Jericho, was in the lot of Benjamin, and they must have been more aggrieved by the Moabite oppression than the others. They paid tribute like the others, but they had the immediate presence of the conquering power reigning in part of their territory.

Having delivered his tribute, Ehud withdrew and accompanied his men so far as the "quarries [stone images] that were by Gilgal." There is, perhaps, some point intended in this mention of the "quarries." The verb from which the word comes means "to cut out" or "to carve as a sculptor," and hence some have supposed that it was a place of graven images which the Moabites had set up in the sacred land. Connecting this with the fact that Gilgal had long been

the place of the Hebrew encampment when they first entered the land, and where the twelve memorial stones taken out of the bed of the Jordan had been placed, it has been deduced that the Moabite idols had been set up in a spot thus memorable and in some degree hallowed in flagrant contempt of the religion and worship of the Israelites.

The ensuing actions of Ehud may therefore appear to have been stimulated, or his wavering purpose strengthened, by the view of this profanation. We at least know that on arriving at this place he turned again and went immediately into the presence of the king. Having just been there before on an errand so agreeable to the king and those about him, Ehud would find easy access on pretense of having forgotten to discharge some part of his mission.

Such, indeed, was Ehud's pretense. He had "a secret errand" to deliver. On this Eglon commanded his attendants to withdraw, and he remained alone with the avenger. Ehud appears unarmed, and it was probably a rule that no one, and especially no Israelite, should appear armed in the presence of the king. But Ehud had a long two-edged dagger girded upon his right thigh under his raiment. Such weapons were usually worn, of course, upon the left thigh, to be drawn out by the right hand. But Ehud being left-handed could wear it so as its presence would not be suspected.

Ehud was aware of the danger that the king might give an alarm; and his anxiety therefore was, as Josephus alleges, to find the opportunity of giving one fatal stroke so that the king might perish without cry or struggle. This could not be achieved while Eglon remained seated. Therefore, drawing near he said, "I have a message from God for you." On this the king, heathen as he was, rose to receive such a message with becoming respect. At that instant Ehud thrust his dagger into the body of the king, burying it in his bowels. So terrible was the stroke that the haft went in after the blade and could not be withdrawn. Leaving it there, Ehud "went out through the porch and shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them."

It had previously been noticed that the king was sitting alone in a summer parlor, or what is nearer, a "parlor of cooling." In most good houses there was a chamber in the upper part of the house overlooking the most open situation available, such as a street, river, or garden. The recess formed by the window is raised a foot or so above the general level of the room and fitted with cushions so that the master can find repose during the heat of the day. All the arrangements of this room are adapted to promote coolness and to form a pleasant and refreshing retreat during the heat of the day.

The privacy of these "cool parlors" is shown by the fact that the servants of Eglon, although aware that Ehud had departed, did not venture to intrude upon their master's privacy until an unusually long lapse of time raised their alarm. On finding the door locked, they opened it with a key and found their master dead on the floor. Their consternation increased when they soon found Israel ready for battle, for Ehud had escaped to the mountains and blown the trumpet crying, "Follow me, for Yahweh has delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand."

Following him, the Israelites hastened to seize the fords of the Jordan. When the Moabites awoke from the stupor which the loss of their king had induced, they found themselves hemmed in by eager enemies, without a leader, and with the retreat to their own country cut off. Under these circumstances they seem to have been too dispirited to make any vigorous stand and were slain by thousands, not one of them escaping, and Israel once more was free.