

THIRD KEY

Note the Knitting Together
of Narratives

The King Who Messed His Pants Read Judges 3

The downfall of King Eglon's kingdom and the deliverance of the Israelites from his hand came about in part because King Eglon messed his pants. Though this may be an ignoble ending to a powerful despot, it follows a pattern in the book of Judges. This pattern always leads to the demise of God's adversary, often through seemingly inconsequential happenstances.

The pattern in Judges begins with God's people abandoning "the LORD their God and serving the Baals [idols]" of the Canaanite people with whom they were living in the Promised Land (Judges 3:7). When they forsook the LORD in this way, the Lord's anger "burned against Israel" and the LORD would deliver them "into the **hands** of plunderers who plundered them" (2:14). Each time, of course, when His people would "cry out," the LORD would raise up judges who would rescue them "from the **hands** of those who plundered them" (2:16).

To unify the book, as well as to underscore Israel's recurring departure from their God, the author of Judges employs the word "hand" repeatedly throughout the book. Hence, the story of King Eglon and his messed pants is preceded by the narrative of Judge Othniel. Judge Othniel "prevailed over" Cushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia, when the LORD gave him "into Othniel's **hand**" (3:10). The narrative which follows King Eglon's includes Deborah, one of the Judges in Israel, and a woman named Jael into whose "**hands**" the LORD delivered the enemy. This regular use of a word to knit together a series of narratives is the third key to a dynamic Bible study (see previous articles).

The gory tale of King Eglon is recited in Judges 3. The Israelites continued to practice "evil in the sight of the LORD" which precipitated eighteen years of domination by Eglon "the king of Moab" (3:12). But, when Israel wailed to the LORD, the LORD produced "a deliverer for them" (3:15). The deliverer, Ehud, was of the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin means "son of my right **hand**," but Ehud was "a left-**handed** man" who would use his left hand to bring liberation for his people Israel (3:15).

Ehud was sent to present the mandatory tribute, a tax from the Israelites, to King Eglon. Unknown to the king, Ehud had brought a "two edged sword" he had made himself. Since he was left-handed, Ehud hitched the sword onto "his right thigh under his cloak" (3:16). When Ehud handed over the tribute to the king, we are told that it was to "a very fat man" (3:17). Only when a description is pertinent to a Biblical plot is one given. Thus, we must take note of this depiction of King Eglon as a fat man.

When Ehud had presented the obligatory tribute, he sent away his own men and pretended that he had "a secret message" for King Eglon. Therefore, King Eglon sent his own servants from the room. While King Eglon was seated "alone in his cool roof chamber," he leaned forward to hear Ehud's message. At that moment Ehud reached with his "left **hand**," and seized the sword from "his right thigh" (3:21). Then he thrust it into the king's belly. Because the king was "a very fat man," the "fat closed over" the sword and its handle (3:22). When there is a sudden death, oftentimes the bowels are loosed. This occurred with King Eglon. At his death, the king messed his pants!

Since they had been left alone in the room, Ehud was able to escape. As he left the room, Ehud closed "the doors of the roof chamber behind him, and locked them" (3:23).

After Ehud's getaway, the servants found that "the doors of the roof chamber were locked." They concluded that the king was merely "relieving himself [going to the bathroom] in the cool room" (v. 24). Their false conclusion brought about by the stench from the chamber of released bowels, lulled them into apathy. So Ehud slipped away "while they were delaying" (3:26). Only after they grew anxious did they get the key that opened the door. Though they found that their king had "fallen to the floor dead," the alarm was slow to go out since the sword was lost in the fat of the king's "belly" (3:25). Hence, with the death of King Eglon and Ehud's flight, Eglon's nation was crushed "under the **hand** of Israel" (3:30).

Because God is sovereign, even trivial incidents are at His disposal to bring about deliverance for His people. Thus, in the hands of God, something as insignificant as a king messing his pants can result in the termination of an evil monarchy.