

PERICOPE 3

Ehud (and Shamgar)

Judges 3:12–31

[Ehud's Lack of Integrity; Shamgar the Foil]

REVIEW, SUMMARY, PREVIEW

Review of Pericope 2: In Jdg 2:6–3:11 (Prologue II and the Othniel story), the religious decline of the Israelites is detailed—the infidelity of the post-Joshua generation of Israelites. Things spiral from bad to worse, creating a paradigm that reflects this descent in each of the subsequent judge stories. Othniel, the first judge, however, is a parade example of a godly leader, whose story follows the paradigm precisely. With divine aid, he becomes Israel's deliverer.

Summary of Pericope 3: The third pericope of Judges (3:12–31) depicts the second major judge in the series, Ehud. His duplicitous words and deceptive actions are subtly deprecated in his story: his left-handedness is suspect; his meticulously planned skullduggery is disfavored; he is equated to Joab, and with excrement. And, finally, the cameo of Shamgar makes this minor judge a foil for the major judge who lacks integrity. With the implicit disapproval of Ehud's actions and

the approval of Shamgar's, integrity in leadership forms the thrust of this pericope.

Preview of Pericope 4: The next pericope, Jdg 4:1–24, is the story of Barak. Raised up by God's representative, Deborah, he refuses to fulfill his commission unless she go with him into battle, despite God's unambiguous promise of triumph. As a result of his faithless fear, Barak loses out on the honor of victory and the capture of the enemy general, Sisera, being preempted in the latter's execution by another woman, a non-Israelite, Jael.

3. *Judges 3:12–31*

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS OF PERICOPE 3

3 Integrity in life, driven by reverence for God and reliance upon him, receives divine approbation (3:12–31).

- 3.1 God who remains ever faithful to his people is worthy of their reverence.
- 3.2 Unilateral, self-reliant strategies show a lack of dependence upon deity.
- 3.3 Duplicity in life, demonstrating a lack of integrity, receives God's disapprobation.
- 3.4 God uses those who avoid self-reliance, duplicity, and disdain for deity.

OVERVIEW

This pericope follows the standard paradigm of 2:11–19 and simulates the ideal model of Othniel (3:7–11), though with some critical differences (see below).

Paradigm	Othniel	Ehud
2:11 <i>Evildoing</i>	3:7	3:12 (x2) Continues
2:14 (x2) <i>To enemies for X years</i>	3:8 Sold 8 years (3:7)	[3:12] [—] 18 years (3:14)
2:18 <i>Groan</i>	3:9 Cry	3:15 Cry
2:16, 18 <i>Judge raised</i>	3:9	3:15
2:18 <i>Yahweh's support</i>	3:10 "Spirit"	[—]
2:16, 18 <i>Fate of enemies</i>	3:10 Given	3:30 Subdued
2:19 <i>Land's rest Judge</i>	3:11 40 years Dies	3:30; 4:1 80 years Dies

Pericope 3 is carefully structured, centered on the assassination of Eglon by Ehud¹:

- A** Negative introduction: defeat; "smite" (3:12–14)
- B** Gift "in his hand" (3:15–17)
- C** Ehud and idols (3:18–19)
- D** Assassination (3:20–22)
- C'** Ehud and idols (3:23–26)
- B'** Yahweh gives enemies "into your hands" (3:27–28a)
- A'** Positive conclusion: victory; "smite" (3:28b–30)

In this story, there is plenty of suspense, tension, intrigue, caricature, and "scatological humor."² Block calls it "a literary cartoon" that is "polemical and coarse."³

1. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, 109.
2. Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 40.
3. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 156.

3. *Judges 3:12–31***THEOLOGICAL FOCUS 3****3 Integrity in life, driven by reverence for God and reliance upon him, receives divine approbation (3:12–31).**

- 3.1 God who remains ever faithful to his people is worthy of their reverence.
- 3.2 Unilateral, self-reliant strategies show a lack of dependence upon deity.
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NOTES 3

- 3.1 *God who remains ever faithful to his people is worthy of their reverence.*

Deviations from the model judge's account—the Othniel story—point to the less than stellar nature of the second judge, Ehud. Both leader and people evidence a lack of reverence for Yahweh.

In the Othniel and Ehud stories, there is, in each case, a single enemy king (Cushan-rishathaim and Eglon, respectively), though in the first account, Cushan-rishathaim is never the subject of a verb and so does not act, at least not literarily. Eglon, on the other hand, is active and vocal in this pericope, symbolic of his active oppression of the Israelites (3:14, 17, 19)—an oppression they deserved as punishment from God for their infidelities and evildoing. Things are quickly beginning to slip and slide away from the relative perfection of the Othniel account.⁴

Right at the start, we are told *twice* that Israel “did evil in the sight of Yahweh” (3:12). Indeed, in its first iteration in that verse, the text declares: “And the sons of Israel *continued* to do evil in the sight of Yahweh”—they

4. As in the Othniel account, in this narrative, too, there is only one Israelite character, Ehud. In contrast, in the accounts of the rest of the major judges, besides the protagonist judge, there is always one or more Israelite character speaking (or being spoken to) on the narrative stage: Deborah (Barak: Judges 4–5); Joash, Ephraimites, leaders of Succoth, Penuelites, and Jether (Gideon: Judges 6–8); elders of Gilead, Jephthah's daughter, and the Ephraimites (Jephthah: Judges 10–12); Samson's parents, Judahites (Samson: Judges 13–16). The multiplicity of actants and speakers, pulling one way and another—usually farther away from a Yahwistic center—reflects the progressive breakdown of the societal and religious fabric of the Israelites.

had never stopped doing evil, it seems, after they first engaged in it in 3:7. And unlike the preceding Othniel narrative, in the Ehud account there is no mention of the Israelites being “sold” into the hands of the enemy; instead we are told that Yahweh “strengthened” (קִזְקָה, *khzq*) Eglon, the king of Moab, against Israel (3:12). The verb occurs in the exodus stories, to describe God “hardening” (קִזְקָה) Pharaoh’s heart (Exod 4:21; 9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8) and that of the Egyptians (14:17). That is, of course, not a good sign.

The result of Yahweh “strengthening” the hand of the king of Moab was that Moabites “took possession” (שָׂרַשׁ, *yrsh*) of the city of the palm trees (Jdg 3:13).⁵ Once Yahweh had prohibited the Israelites from infringing upon Moabite territory, land he had given those peoples (Deut 2:9). Now the Moabites were encroaching upon land allotted to the Israelites, and with Yahweh himself behind that invasion. Evildoing has its consequences. “Taking possession” (or “driving out,” also שָׂרַשׁ), was exactly what the *Israelites* were supposed to do, and at which they had failed (see שָׂרַשׁ in Jdg 1:19, 20, 21, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33; and 2:6, 21, 23).⁶ Countering his own “strengthening” of the hand of the Moabite oppressor, Eglon (3:12), Yahweh then “raises up” an Israelite deliverer, Ehud (3:15). But quite surprisingly, for the rest of the pericope, Yahweh does not seem at all involved with the goings on. We are not told that Yahweh “was with the judge” (as the paradigm had it, 2:18), or that his Spirit came upon that individual (as with Othniel, 3:10). And the final victory won by the Israelites is not attributed by the narrator to any work of Yahweh, either (3:29–30).

This virtual absence of Yahweh in the story also raises suspicions about how his people, in particular his leader, regarded him. While one assumes that God’s commissioning a deliverer and endowing that judge with the Spirit is a guarantee of the individual’s upright behavior and exemplary life, that is not necessarily so: from Othniel to Samson, several of the judges are empowered by God and endued by the Spirit, yet there is a progressive and inexorable deterioration of behavior and morality despite this special divine intervention and/or connection. So too, here, with Ehud; his being “raised up” by Yahweh does not necessarily imply that all his actions were scrupulous and virtuous. Rather, Yahweh’s curious absence from the main event of Eglon’s assassination (3:16–25), as well as from the dénouement of

5. The “city of palm trees” is likely to have been Jericho, or near it (Deut 34:3; 2 Chr 28:15). If so, Eglon had captured a key city that Israel had taken over under Joshua (Joshua 2–6), achieving what even the capable prophet Balaam could not (Numbers 22–24).

6. Also see Josh 1:11, 15; 3:10; 8:7; 13:6; 23:5, 9, for divine utterances that exhorted and promised “possession” (from שָׂרַשׁ) of the land.

the story, the routing of the Moabites (3:26–30), give the reader pause and raise suspicions.

In the case of Othniel's victory over Cushan-rishathaim, at the onset of Israel's military engagement with the enemy, the narrator asserted that Yahweh "gave" the enemy king into Othniel's hand (3:10). Here, however, things are more indirect: Yahweh's role in the pericope (for the only time after 3:15) is described in Ehud's voice and not by the narrator, and that as part of Ehud's exhortation to his troops *after* the assassination of the enemy king (3:28).⁷ Both in Othniel's story and in Barak's, God's role in the military victory is explicitly noted by the narrator (3:10; 4:23). Here, in Ehud's story, Moab is merely the subject of a passive verb: "Moab was subdued . . . under the hand of Israel" (3:30). So, outside of Ehud's declaration in 3:28, there is no sign of Yahweh or his activity. As we will see, Ehud's self-interest, self-reliance, and duplicity preclude any involvement by deity. Apparently God is not needed in those precincts.

Another structural element underscores the disdain of Yahweh in the story. The mention of "idols" (from פסיל, *pasil*) in 3:19 and 3:26 brackets the heart of the pericope—the story of Eglon's killing. These religious objects were manmade cult images; and Ehud passes by them on his way in to kill, and again as he leaves from his kill. The noun is derived from the verb פסל (*pasal*) meaning to "hew/carve" (Deut 10:1, 3); in the OT פסל/פסיל always indicates hewn/carved idols.⁸ Obviously these are anti-Yahwistic: Jdg 2:2, 11–13, 17, 19. Judges 3:6 had already warned of the Israelites' predilection for Canaanite gods and, indeed, 3:12 asserts that such evildoing had "continued" into the time of this narrative. "[T]he twin references to the *pēsîlîm* articulate the decisive and dramatic core of the adventure. Everything that precedes 3:19–26 is preliminary; everything which follows is anticlimactic."⁹ Bookending the critical core of the Ehud story (3:19, 26), one wonders why these idols are markers for the narrative. Where did they come from and what was Ehud doing in relation to them? "Cultic indolence," O'Connell, called it:

The predominant deuteronomic concern, that of cultic disloyalty, remains implicit in Ehud's failure to remove from the land the twice-mentioned idols that frame the portrayal of Eglon's assassination (3:19a and 3:26b). This failure to remove the

7. This is the only account in Judges in which an enemy king is killed before his army is routed.

8. In Judges, "idols" are found only in 3:19, 26 and 17:3, 4; 18:14, 17, 18, 20, 30, 31. All of the latter set are pejorative labels; obviously that is the denotation of the former set as well.

9. Mobley, *The Empty Men*, 90.

idols characterizes negatively both Ehud (as microcosm) and the tribe whom he delivers (as macrocosm) and ostensibly leads to the religious apostasy that begins the following deliverer account (cf. 4:1).¹⁰

Even if they were Moabite installations, it would certainly have been a lot easier to sabotage these idols than to assassinate the highest-ranking Moabite official. After all, the command to the Israelites to destroy them was unambiguous (פִּסְיִל in Deut 7:5, 25; 12:3; פִּסְלֵי in Deut 4:16, 23, 25; 5:8; 27:15).¹¹ If Ehud accomplished the murder of the king with relative ease, surely he could have done something about the idols.

But, despite this disdain for Yahweh, all is not lost. One must remember that this is only the account of the second judge, the one who immediately follows the paradigmatic model of the first judge, Othniel. So not everything has gone awry yet. Ehud, we will see, “escapes” (3:26 [×2]) after his daring single-(left)handed assassination of Eglon; but, following the attack of the Israelites, none of the Moabites “escapes” (3:29). And as the pericope concludes, Israel succeeds in overthrowing the yoke of the oppressor: though the Moabites “smite” (נָכַח, *nkh*) Israel at the beginning of the narrative (3:13), in the end they are the ones who are “smitten” (3:29). And, finally, the land is said to enjoy rest for eighty years, an unusually long period, the longest span of rest in Judges (the next closest is forty: 3:11; 5:31; 8:28).

All that to say, evidently Yahweh was at work, even though he seems to have been (literarily) absent: there are fingerprints of providence all along.

3.2 *Unilateral, self-reliant strategies show a lack of dependence upon deity.*

Right at the start of the Ehud story we get a sense that something is not right. Yahweh raises up Ehud, “the Benjaminite, a left-handed man” (3:15). There is an assonant repetition of יְמִינִי, *ymini*, in בֶּן־הַיְמִינִי (*ben-haymini*, “the Benjaminite,” literally “son of the *right* [hand]”) and in אֶטֶר יְדֵי־יְמִינוֹ (*’itter yad-ymino*, “bound in his *right* hand”), both relatively rare terms. The first, the gentilic or demonymous form of the tribal affiliation, is unusual and used only in about a dozen out of seventy references to Benjaminites in the OT; elsewhere it is the collective בְּנֵי־בִין (*binyamin*, “Benjamin”)

10. O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 84.

11. Also see 2 Kgs 17:41; 2 Chr 33:19, 22; 34:3, 4, 7; Ps 78:58; and often in the prophets.

or בְּנֵי בִּנְיָמִן (*bne binyamin*, “sons of Benjamin”).¹² And the only other use of אֶתֶר יִרְדְּמִינָה in Scripture is in 20:16, where it is used of the Benjaminites who aid and abet wickedness.¹³ So it appears that Ehud is not all “right” (!), and is not what he appears to be or is supposed to be: he is a “son of the right hand” who is “bound in his right hand.”¹⁴ His left-handedness may be a subtle disparagement.

In many cultures, including cultures in the ancient Near East, the left hand is associated with impurity or deviance. The right is the place of honor and sovereignty, virility, strength, goodness; the left the place of vassalage, subservience, evil, and weakness. . . . [T]he left hand may not be used for eating; it is commonly associated with matters of personal hygiene that discourage its use in the preparation or ingestion of food. The left hand is expressly disfavored in ancient Israelite ritual.¹⁵

The sense of Ehud’s deficiency is amplified by these negative connotations of left-handedness. In any case, 3:15 ends up depicting Ehud, the left-handed son of right-handers, as an unlikely hero who has a strange whiff about him. “[I]f the point of the wordplay is indeed to highlight a ‘falling short’ in a core area of one’s identity, . . . can one not further extend this sense of ‘falling short’ and see it as subtly foreshadowing certain of Ehud’s actions in the ensuing narrative?”¹⁶ It seems likely, then, that Ehud’s subsequent deceptions in this story are subtly being deprecated from the very start.

Instead of simply highlighting Ehud’s left-handedness, the incongruity revealed by the wordplay may carry deeper symbolic significance in portraying Ehud as someone whose actions and choices are liable to fall short of the standard expected of him on

12. Wong, *Compositional Strategy*, 114–15.

13. If those Benjaminites fell far short of the expected norm of behavior as Israelites—an incongruity between action and identity that led to the dreadful civil war (see Pericope 13: Jdg 19:1–30 and Pericope 14: Jdg 20:1–21:25)—then it is fair to say that the same incongruity and improbity is reflected, albeit in a less intense way, in Ehud, the second judge in the series, and another Benjaminite. “[T]he bizarre behaviour of these Benjaminites in Judges 20 is no isolated incident when it comes to Benjaminites. For another Benjaminite, a judge of Israel, no less, had also displayed the same propensity to act in a way that falls short of the expected norm” (ibid., 124).

14. Halpern thinks that that the left-handedness of these Benjaminites was a nurtured deviance, accomplished by literally “binding” the right hand, to give such warriors an advantage over others in a sword-and-shield battle (“The Assassination of Eglon,” 35).

15. Miller, “Verbal Feud in the Hebrew Bible,” 112–13. See Exod 29:20; Lev 7:32; 8:23.

16. Wong, *Compositional Strategy*, 117.

the basis of who he is. Thus, if the choice of Ehud is surprising, it is surprising not only because his restriction in the right hand obviously fell short of the norm expected of a “son of the right-handers,” but also because the tactics he used likewise fell short of the standard expected of a deliverer raised up by YHWH.¹⁷

The anomaly of a member of a right-handed tribe being a left-handed man seems to be hinting at the theological oddity of a deliverer raised up by Yahweh (3:15) resorting to underhanded tactics.

It is striking that a unilateral human endeavor without any input from deity is undertaken to solve the eighteen-year-long thorny problem that Eglon and Moab posed for the Israelites. Such an attitude, showing independence from Yahweh, is suggested by the phrase in 3:16, *וַיַּעַשׂ לּוֹ אֶהוּד חֶרֶב* (*wayya'as lo ehud khereb*), “Ehud made *for himself* a sword,” seeing לוֹ as reflexive, “for himself.” There is no inquiry of Yahweh, no input from Yahweh, no imperative from Yahweh. And the sword is *for himself*, not for tribe, nation, or deity. This, in itself, is not necessarily negative, but in light of Yahweh’s invisibility throughout the account, it certainly is suspicious.

The judge/deliverer then goes to great lengths to prepare for his lethal meeting with the oppressor-in-chief, ostensibly to present a tribute (3:15, 18). Ehud manufactures a weapon fit/appropriate for the corpulent Eglon (3:17, 22): its length is stressed—a “cubit” long (about 12–18 inches)—“custom-designed for Eglon: short enough to conceal; long enough to do him in.”¹⁸

The hand-motif recurs in this narrative. For starters, as we have seen, Ehud is “a left-handed man” (*אִישׁ אֶשֶׁר יָדָיו יְמִינֵי*, *ish 'itter yad-ymino*), and the tribute to Eglon is “sent” (*שִׁלְחָה*, *shlkh*) “by his hand” (*בְּיָדוֹ*, *byado*, 3:15). At the climax of the story, Ehud “stretches” (*שִׁלְחָה*) his “hand” (*יָד*, *yad*) to consummate his regicide (3:21). The narrative concludes with a statement that Moab was subdued that day under the hand (*יָד*) of Israel (3:30).¹⁹ The hand of Ehud and the hand of Israel monopolize the story, with but a single mention by Ehud about Yahweh giving the Moabites into the “hand” (*יָד*) of the Israelites (3:28).

And what of 3:28, itself—was that an unadulterated sign of reliance on Yahweh by Ehud? Thus far, there has been “no hint of any spiritual sensitivity in Ehud’s heart nor any sense of divine calling. On the contrary, Ehud operates like a typical Canaanite of his time—cleverly, opportunistically,

17. *Ibid.*, 119–20.

18. O’Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 89 n.48.

19. There is also the paronomasia of Ehud’s sword “thrust” (*תָּקַע*, *tq*) into Eglon’s belly (3:21), and his “blowing” (also *תָּקַע*) a trumpet to muster his troops (3:28).

and violently, apparently for his own glory.”²⁰ Nonetheless, Ehud’s declaration in 3:28, in the perfect tense, that “Yahweh has given your enemies the Moabites into your hands,” is significant (see similar assertions in 4:14; 7:14–15: all creditable utterances).²¹ While he has employed deception in his assassination (see below), he is not completely lacking in faith or in knowledge of the Almighty. Remember, the slippage of the judges has only begun with Ehud and, as the first to follow Othniel’s perfect footsteps, one does not expect to see him depicted with too much negativity. Both Othniel and Ehud were, after all, raised by Yahweh (3:9, 15—the only two judges who are called “deliverers,” using a substantival participle), and both brought rest to the land (3:11, 30).²²

But notice this: While it is quite appropriate that Ehud, after the assassination and the summoning of his troops, orders them, “Follow after me” (3:28, where he also invokes Yahweh), one again gets the sense of a self-focused individual.²³ He appears intent on using himself as a model primarily, with his army following him; he supports his exhortation with Yahweh’s name only secondarily.

[T]he subsequent growing concern of the Judges compiler/redactor with the leadership qualities of Israel’s deliverers leads one, in retrospect, to inquire whether Ehud’s characterization

20. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 171. In Pericope 4 (Jdg 4:1–24), one may say the same about Jael, who also assassinated an enemy leader by deceiving him. But the striking difference between her and Ehud is the total lack of premeditation on her part: her victim came to her door, she improvised on a weapon, and she is depicted as a foil for the faltering and fearful hero, Barak. Ehud, on the other hand, had his tactics all planned out. A better comparison with Ehud—and clearly deliberate on the part of the narrator—is Shamgar (see below). Again, it must be stressed that more than the historical actions of the characters (the *world behind the text*), it is the way in which those actions are depicted—i.e., how the narrative is written, focused, and directed (the *world in front of the text*)—that determines the theological thrust of the text, and therefrom, the application of a sermon on that text.

21. Such an idiom was also used by God himself: Jdg 1:2; 7:9.

22. Chisholm, who advocates the view that Ehud is entirely positive in this narrative, has noted the parallels between Ehud and David: collocations of $\text{יָדָהּ} \text{לְיָדָהּ}$ and $\text{לָקַחַת} \text{לְיָדָהּ}$ (*shalakh yad*, “sending/stretching the hand,” and *laqakh khereb*, “taking the sword” Jdg 3:21; 1 Sam 17:49, 51: the only places they occur together in the OT); Yahweh “giving [the enemy] into your hand” (Jdg 3:28; 1 Sam 17:47); and “falling to the ground” (Jdg 3:25; 1 Sam 17:49). Yet the differences are considerable, primarily David’s almost incessant acknowledgement of the role of Yahweh before his killing of Goliath (1 Sam 17:26, 36–37, 45–47), completely absent in Ehud’s story, except for the exhortation to his troops in 3:28, *after* the coup has been accomplished. See Chisholm, “Ehud: Assessing an Assassin,” 280.

23. With 3:27 placing Ehud in front of his troops, the command in 3:28 is clearly to follow him, Ehud, not the Moabites, who had not yet mustered.

as a self-promoting saviour is an intended nuance. While Ehud claims Yhwh's guarantee of success in 3:28ab on the basis of his foregoing success, there is something implicitly self-authenticating about it, for by no explicit means had Yhwh disclosed this to any character in the story world.²⁴

Besides, in the case of Gideon, his sharing of victory laurels with Yahweh is subsequently proven to be born of arrogance and conceit (8:17, 20). So much so, one wonders if the narrator's subtle disparagement is also reflected in the absence of any statement at the end of the narrative that "Ehud judged Israel for X years." Only Gideon shares that dubious distinction. Even Samson has a statement to this effect.

3.3 *Duplicity in life, demonstrating a lack of integrity, receives God's disapprobation.*

After presenting the Israelite tribute to Moab, Ehud leaves, only to return to the king (3:19). Ehud speaks twice to Eglon, employing a mere six words total: "I have a secret *message* [דבר, *dbr*, also 'thing'] for you, O king" (3:19), and "I have a *message* [thing] from God for you" (3:20). Clearly the utterances were intended to deceive: Eglon expected a "message," but Ehud gave him a "thing" (the sword). Thus "the duplicity of both speeches' use of דבר may play on a key feature of Ehud's sword—its double-edgedness."²⁵ The tool Ehud fashioned for the assassination was a "sword of (two) mouths," i.e., a two-edged sword (3:16; for an identical Greek term, see Sir 21:3; Heb 4:12; Rev 1:16; 2:12). Berman concludes: "[T]he double-, or multi-edged sword, which we find . . . in the biblical, apocryphal and pseudepigraphal literature, always bears a metaphorical or figurative meaning pertaining to orality. In all but one case, the 'sword of [two] mouths' stands as a trope for the potency of speech."²⁶ In any case, "sword" and "mouth" are linked frequently: "by edge of the sword" is literally "by the mouth of the sword" (לפי־חֶרֶב, *lpi-khareb*; see Jdg 1:8; 25; 4:15, 16; 7:22; 18:27; 20:37, 48; 21:10; and elsewhere in the OT). All that to say, there is intentional duplicity here. And so the sword is doubly concealed—physically, under Ehud's cloak (3:16), and verbally, by referring to it as a "message/thing" (3:3:20). The lin-

24. O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 97–98.

25. *Ibid.*, 91 n.52.

26. Berman, "The 'Sword of Mouths,'" 292–93; also see Wong, *Compositional Strategy*, 121–22. "Sword of mouths" is found in Ps 149:6 and Prov 5:4. "Sword" can denote, or be parallel to, speech (Ps 57:5; Isa 49:2): swords open (Ps 37:14; Ezek 21:33); they devour/eat (Deut 32:42; 2 Sam 2:26; 11:25; Isa 31:8; Jer 12:12; 46:14; Nahum 3:15); and are satiated (Isa 34:5; Jer 46:10).

guistic parallels between Ehud's preparation and his assassination of Eglon are also notable²⁷:

	Preparation		Assassination
3:15	וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ ... בְיַדוֹ מִנְחָה wayyishlkhu ... <i>byado minkhah</i> "And they sent ... tribute by his <i>hand</i> "	3:21α	וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶהְדוּד אֶת־יָדוֹ שְׂמאלוֹ wayyishlakh 'ehud 'et-yad smo'lo "And Ehud sent [out] his left <i>hand</i> "
3:16a	וַיַּעַשׂ לוֹ ... חֶרֶב wayya'as lo ... <i>khereb</i> "and he made for himself ... a <i>sword</i> "	3:21aβ	וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הַחֶרֶב wayyiqqakh 'et-hakhereb "and he took the <i>sword</i> "
3:16b	עַל יָרֵךְ יְמִינוֹ 'al yerek ymino "on his <i>right thigh</i> "	3:21αγ	מֵעַל יָרֵךְ יְמִינוֹ me'al yerek ymino "from his <i>right thigh</i> "

This was a carefully plotted undertaking, intended to deceive and to kill. The undercurrent of a perfidious plot is detected in the very commencement of the story, with the tribute literarily hiding (sandwiching) a plot to murder.

A Tribute sent by the hand of Ehud (3:15)

B Ehud makes a sword and hides it (3:16)

A' Tribute presented by Ehud (3:17)

Ehud's use of deception is a significant part of the development of the story: he conceals his weapon on his right thigh, because of his left-handedness (3:16); he makes an innocent first visit to allay suspicion and, subsequently, a second one for his tactical and homicidal operation (3:18, 19); he leaves his weapon in the stout Eglon's belly and lets the man's fat close around it, preventing any blood stains getting on his person (though fecal matter did seep out—the smell of which apparently fooled the king's courtiers, 3:22; see below); and he locks the doors behind him as he makes his escape (3:23) to keep the courtiers out longer.²⁸ Of course, all of this could be interpreted

27. From O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 91 n.52.

28. *Ibid.*, 91–92. Locking the doors from the outside would have been possible for Ehud, if the lock was of the "tumbler" kind (see Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, 188 n.40). In terms of the architecture of the murder location, it is likely that an anteroom ("vestibule," 3:23) separated the inner king's chamber ("roof chamber," 3:20, 23, 24, 25) from an outer servants' waiting area (room? courtyard?). It is also likely, going by the servants' wrong assumption in 3:24, that the king's chamber had a toilet for Eglon's use. Ehud kills the king (3:21–22), exits the king's chamber into the vestibule, locks the

positively as Ehud's actions undertaken with a trust in Yahweh's ability to give him victory.²⁹ But, again, the absence of Yahweh in these transactions is a hint of pejoration from the narrator's quill.

The action is fast-forwarded from the moment the king rises to greet Ehud the second time around (3:20)—eight *wayyiqtol* verb forms cascade through 3:21–23 as the assassination is accomplished: Ehud stretched, he took, he thrust, the handle entered, the fat closed, he did not draw out, excrement (implied) came out, Ehud came out, closed the doors, and locked them (וַיִּשְׁלַח, וַיִּקַּח, וַיִּתְקַע, וַיִּבֵּא, וַיִּסְגֵּר, וַיִּצְא, וַיִּצְא, וַיִּסְגֵּר; *wayyishlakh, wayyiqqakh, wayyitqa'eha, wayyabo', wayyisgor, wayyetse', wayyetse', wayyisgor*)!³⁰ He knows what he is doing—it is intentional, deliberate, and delivered with malice aforethought. “Taken together therefore, the unexpected left-handed ‘son of the right-handers’ wielding a double mouthed weapon would constitute a fitting symbolic introduction to an incongruously deceptive deliverer who would attempt an assassination with the help of verbal double entendres.”³¹

There is yet another argument for seeing Ehud negatively in this story: the parallels between Ehud and Joab—their respective assassinations are remarkably similar.³²

door to the king's chamber behind him (3:23), and exits from the vestibule into the outer servants' area and leaves the palace (3:24a, 26). The courtiers, considering Ehud's business with the king finished, enter the vestibule but are stymied by the locked door (and the smell of excreta) (3:24bcd, 25a).

29. And, no doubt, these positive outcomes were the results of Yahweh's sovereign provision.

30. If the sword was of the kind without a hilt, its going in, handle and all (3:22), is a plausible account.

31. Wong, *Compositional Strategy*, 123.

32. Idem, “Ehud and Joab,” 404–5.

EHUD	JOAB
Assassinates Eglon (Jdg 3:15–22)	Assassinates Abner and Amasa (2 Sam 3:27; 20:8–10)
<i>Sword in the belly</i> (בִּטֶן, <i>btn</i> , Jdg 3:21–22)	<i>Sword in the belly</i> (דְּמוֹשׁ, <i>dms</i> , 2 Sam 3:27 [see 1 Kgs 2:32]; 20:10)
Deception involving <i>speech</i> (דְּבַר, <i>dbr</i> , Jdg 3:19)	Deception involving <i>speech</i> (דְּבַר, 2 Sam 3:27)
Carriage of weapon (חֶגֶר [khgr, girded], מִדָּ, [<i>md</i> , garment], Jdg 3:16)	Carriage of weapon (מִדָּ, חֶגֶר, 2 Sam 20:8)
Disembowelment (Jdg 3:22)	Disembowelment (2 Sam 20:10)

Scripture clearly is disapproving of Joab's actions: see 2 Sam 3:28–39; 1 Kgs 2:5–6, 31–32. That there was a deliberate attempt to link Joab's killing of Amasa with Ehud's killing of Eglon seems evident. The elaborate details of Joab's attire (2 Sam 20:8) seem to be quite unnecessary, unlike in the case of Ehud where covertness was critical. Also, it is Joab's left hand that delivers the *coup de grâce* (his right hand held Amasa's beard, 20:9), though it would not have mattered to the story had Joab held Amasa's beard with his left hand and thrust the sword in with his right; for Ehud, his other-sidedness helped him smuggle in a weapon. The notice of Amasa's disembowelment (20:10) also seems somewhat adventitious; that of Eglon was crucial to Ehud's escape cloaked in nasty odors. All that to say, Joab's actions seem to have been described with an intentional allusion to Ehud's.

If Joab's two assassinations are indeed meant to be understood negatively . . . one can infer that there must have been aspects of Ehud's assassination that were also viewed negatively by the author of the Joab accounts. And since the allusions seem to concentrate especially on the use of deception, one can only conclude that this use of deception by Ehud must have been what was viewed negatively by the author of the Joab accounts. . . . [T]his negative view of Ehud's use of deception must have been sufficiently well established among contemporaries of the author of the Joab accounts for him to simply make the allusions without having to worry about his audience missing the point. What this seems to suggest is that a negative view of Ehud's use of deception may have early intra-biblical support.³³

33. Ibid., 409–10. Chisholm, countering Wong's case, observes that there are similarities between Ehud's assassination of Eglon and Jael's of Sisera (see Pericope 4: Jdg

Thus it all seems to be a conscious attempt to draw parallels between one deception and another, equating the negative evaluation of one with that of the other.

Altogether, Ehud does not fare very well in the narrator’s reckoning, and that is cleverly expressed in a carefully constructed text that plays on who and what is going in and out in 3:19–24.

A	Courtiers “go out” (יֵצֵא, <i>yts’</i> , 3:19)
B	Ehud “goes in” (בִּיאַ, <i>bo’</i> , 3:20)
C	Sword “goes in” (3:22a)
C’	Excrement “goes out” (3:22d)
B’	Ehud “goes out” (×2; 3:23a, 24a)
A’	Courtiers “come in” (3:24b)

The “going out” and “going in” of courtiers and Ehud, dagger and excrement, are neatly arranged in concentric fashion, centering on the assassination proper: dagger goes in and excrement goes out (C, C’, 3:21). Notice that Ehud “goes in” and the sword “goes in” (B, C)—the implement and its maker/carrier/user are identified with each other: both “go in.” But Ehud is also set in parallel with excrement: *both* “go out” (C’, B’)! This parallelism between fecal matter going out (3:22d) and Ehud going out (3:23a) indicates the narrator’s scatological regard for Ehud’s duplicitous activities. Also notice the syntactical and assonant parallels between the two goes out:

	הַפְּרִשְׁדוֹנָה		וַיֵּצֵא
3:22d	<i>haparshdonah</i>		<i>wayyetse’</i>
	“through the anus/opening”		“and it went out”
	הַמִּסְדְּרוֹנָה	אֶהוּד	וַיֵּצֵא
3:23a	<i>hammisdronah</i>	<i>’ehud</i>	<i>wayyetse’</i>
	“into the vestibule”	“Ehud”	“and he went out”

4:1–24): both “drive” weapons into their victims’ bodies (חָקַט, *taq’*; 3:21; 4:21); and the demise of these enemies are described similarly: “Behold, their master falling to the ground, dead” (3:25) and “Behold, Sisera falling, dead” (4:25) (*Judges and Ruth*, 196–97). One may rebut this by arguing that, unlike Ehud’s act, Jael’s was entirely unpremeditated. Nonetheless, the parallels here are valid, and show that Ehud’s killing of the foreign king was indeed a welcome end to an oppressive regime. In sum, it is the whole gestalt of the Ehud account that renders this judge in a negative light—but not *entirely* negative; after all, he is but the second judge on the downhill slope of judgeships. In any case, here is a judge who is showing clear signs of not being utterly committed to Yahweh, signs that are muted, but surely present. Then, of course, there is Shamgar who, in my reading, starkly shows up Ehud for his failures (see below).

There seems to be a deliberate effort to create wordplays between the exit of Ehud and the egress of feces!³⁴ “[T]he repetition of the verb [‘go out’] in such different contexts, underscored by a cluster of consonance, assonance and word stress in the concluding word of each clause, does warrant attention. . . . Ironic, the comparison is not honorable to Ehud.”³⁵ No, this is not a very positive depiction of the Israelite deliverer—not at all.

Yet there can be no doubt that this account also mocks both the Moabite king (Eglon = “fat calf”³⁶) and his courtiers who are completely taken in by Ehud’s sleight of hand. After Ehud’s decampment, they fail to enter Eglon’s private room, thinking that their lord was relieving himself—the stench of the intestinal detritus seeping out of the stab wound (or the anus, with an involuntary relaxation of the sphincter) no doubt was the cause of this misdirection (3:22, 24).³⁷ And so Eglon’s people “delayed” in

34. Barré, “The Meaning of *PRŠDN*,” 8–9. The *hapax legomenon* הַפְּרִשְׁדָּנָה (3:22) has caused considerable confusion. O’Connell’s explanation makes the most sense, seeing פִּרְשָׁן as “anus” (from an Akkadian cognate meaning “hole, opening”; Koelher, *et al.*, “פִּרְשָׁן,” 978), with the final ה, *h*, being an ה-locative (“at/through the anus”). Thus הַפְּרִשְׁדָּנָה would mean “and it went out through the anus.” (Of course, the “opening” may as well have been that created by Ehud’s sword perforating the descending colon.) But this leaves the subject missing. “[I]n view of the obviousness of the subject and the evocative force of innuendo (both פִּרְשָׁן [*prsh*] ‘faecal matter’ and נִצָּח [*ts’h*] ‘filth, excrement’ are paronomastically echoed in וַיֵּצֵא הַפְּרִשְׁדָּנָה, its ellipsis need hardly offend us. The difficult וַיֵּצֵא הַפְּרִשְׁדָּנָה (3:22b) may therefore mean, ‘and it [i.e. “excrement”] went out the anus.’” See *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 93 n.54.

35. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony*, 38–39.

36. The name “Eglon” is, like “Cushan-rishathaim” in 3:8, a label of ridicule; it recalls עֵגֶל, *gl* = “calf” (see Exod 32:4, 8, 19, 20, 24, 35, for the golden “calf”), or עֵגֶלָה, *glh* = “heifer” (Jdg 14:18), making Eglon calf-like or bovine. No doubt, there is a subtle link with עֵגֶל (*gl*, “round/rotund”) as well. His corpulence is clearly attested—“very fat” (3:17; the adjective “fat,” בָּרִיא, *bari*, is often used of “fat” cattle: Gen 41:2, 4, 5, 7, 18, 20; 1 Kgs 4:23; Ezek 34:20; Zech 11:16). Perhaps Eglon’s obesity is also to be linked with the Moabites’ eighteen-year-long oppression of the Israelites (Jdg 3:14), as they live off the fat of the land. “Fat” shows up again in the story, with a different word: it envelops the blade of Ehud’s weapon thrust into the belly of the “fat calf” (3:22). Subsequently, the defeated Moabites are described as כָּל־שָׁמֶן וְכָל־אִישׁ חָיִל, *kal-shamen wkal-ish khayil*, “all stout and all valiant men” (3:29). The word שָׁמֶן, like בָּרִיא (“fat”) applied to Eglon in 3:17, is an antonym of רָזָה (*razeh*, “lean”) (see Num 13:20 and Ezek 34:20). Webb notes, therefore, that שָׁמֶן “in this context is capable of the same kind of *double entendre* as the word ‘stout’ in English” (*Judges*, 166). The verb form of the noun also indicates a dulling of heart (Isa 6:10), adding insult to the injury of Eglon and his cohorts here. Physically and mentally, they are no match for Ehud and his crew.

37. The courtiers thought Eglon was “relieving himself” (3:24)—literally: “he was covering his feet” (having dropped his garments?)—an euphemism for excretion. Or, “feet” here may be a euphemism for genitalia (as in Deut 28:57; Isa 7:20).

the vestibule,³⁸ “till they were embarrassed” (3:25), daring not to disturb their lord in his privy.

Thus, the tribute/offering to Eglon (3:15, 17), ends up being a sacrifice of Eglon! There is plenty of sacrificial imagery here: the offering itself (מִנְחָה, *minkhah*, 3:15, 17, 18),³⁹ “to offer” (קָרַב, *qarab*, in the hiphil; 3:17, 18),⁴⁰ “to send” (שָׁלַח, *shalakh*, 3:15),⁴¹ and even a cutting implement (3:16, 21, 22), not to mention a “very fat [בָּרִיאַ מֵאֵד, *bari’ mōd*]” “calf” (3:17), and all the “fat” (חֶלֶב, *kheleb*) that is dissected out (3:22)!⁴² That this fattened calf is called “king of Moab” four times (3:12, 14, 15, 17)—even Ehud calls him king (3:19)—only multiplies the irony.⁴³ Yet for all the skewering of Moab (at least of its king—literally!), there is a clear thread of anti-Ehud polemic detectible.

3.4 *God uses those who avoid self-reliance, duplicity, and disdain for deity.*

The one-verse note about Shamgar (3:31) is a satire in a nutshell. Both the enemy (Philistines) and the preceding hero (Ehud) are discomfited by a number of curious elements that mark his cameo. Most certainly, an oxgoad is a strange weapon with which to do war.⁴⁴ That it succeeds in “striking down” (3:31; the verb is also used in 3:13, 29) six hundred Philistines is, well, striking! The one who, ostensibly, is an ox-driver had become a warrior: clearly the man was an amateur, not a professional, at least by his choice of improvised weapon.

Equally odd are the antecedents of Shamgar. He is the son of “Anath” (also noted as such in 5:6), a Canaanite goddess (“Anath/Anat”) known to be a violent warrior and the consort of Baal. She was one of the leading deities in the Canaanite pantheon, well attested in Ugarit literature. “Ben Anath” is also found in Egyptian records, in the person of a Syrian sea captain, whom Pharaoh Rameses II rewarded for his services by giving him

38. “Delaying” is הִתְמַחְמַח, *hitmahmham* (3:26), that contains the reduplication of מָה (*mah*, “what”), so “what?-what?-ing,” or “dilly-dallying” or even “hemming-and-hawing.”

39. The word מִנְחָה is commonly employed of grain offerings to Yahweh (Lev 2:1–15; 5:13; 6:7–16; etc.). Such an allusion adds to the pejorative depiction of the Moabites as those extracting “tribute” that rightly belonged to Yahweh.

40. See Lev 1:1–15; 2:1–14; etc.

41. See Lev 14:7, 53; 16:10, 21, 22, 26; etc.

42. See Lev 3:3–17; 4:8, 9, 19, 26, 31, 35; etc.

43. But the instant Eglon is killed, his name drops out of the story.

44. The oxgoad was likely an instrument used to train oxen to be docile: a 4–6-foot long wooden pole with a metal point at one end.

one of his daughters in marriage.⁴⁵ Our Shamgar, too, may have been Syrian, a Canaanite who lived among the Israelites and intermarried with them (1:21–36; 3:6).⁴⁶

Shamgar’s mini-account is explicitly linked to Ehud’s narrative: 3:31 commences with “And *after him* [Ehud]” and tells us that “he [Shamgar] *also* delivered Israel.” If he, *also*, like Ehud “delivered” Israel, then Yahweh, who raised Ehud as a “deliverer” (3:15), may well have been sovereignly behind Shamgar’s being raised up as a deliverer of Israel, too. Since 4:1 refers back to Ehud again, 3:31 appears to be a deliberate interpolation of Shamgar’s story into Ehud’s, *before* the formal conclusion of the latter’s narrative, causing the reader to take a second look at this man without antecedents, without tribe, without location, and without formal weaponry or army, who “also” manages to “deliver” Israel.

From 10:11 that has Yahweh claiming to have delivered the Israelites from a number of Canaanite peoples *himself*, including the Philistines—3:31 has the only mention of deliverance from this group in Judges prior to 10:11—one may safely assume that Shamgar, the one who struck down six hundred of them, was an agent of the divine.⁴⁷ That he is said to “also deliver” Israel (3:31) seems to be adequate evidence in itself of Shamgar’s connections with deity.

In short, here’s a foreigner whose genealogy is unknown (unlike Ehud, an Israelite, whose antecedents are pointedly provided: “son of Gera, the Benjaminite,” 3:15), who has no specific characteristics of note (unlike the left-handedness of Ehud, 3:15), who, as far as we can tell, is not a leader (unlike Ehud who was appointed by the “sons of Israel” to take tribute to Eglon, 3:15), who does not muster troops to aid his endeavors (unlike Ehud, 3:27–29), who does not speak in the narrative (unlike Ehud and his double-mouthedness, 3:19), who has no fancy weapon (unlike Ehud who, strategizing carefully, fashioned for himself a cubit-long, double-edged sword, that was bound on his right thigh, under his cloak—a detailed description of his

45. The same Pharaoh also called another daughter *bint ‘Anath* (daughter of Anath).

46. See Danelius, “Shamgar Ben ‘Anath,” 191. “Shamgar” (שַׁמְגָר, *shmgr*) includes גַּר, *gr*, a hint that perhaps he was a “sojourner” (גַּר, *ger*) and a proselyte. Perhaps this would explain Egyptian inscriptions of the time that indicate the existence of an *‘Apiru* (“Hebrew”) “troop of *An[ath]*.” Analogous forms of “Shamgar” have been discovered in Nuzi texts (Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 173). “Son of Anath” has also been found inscribed on Phoenician arrowheads as an “honorific military title,” rather than as a particular pedigree (Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan*, 134–35).

47. It is not at all accidental here that Yahweh does not list deliverance from the Moabites in his resume (10:11; that was entirely Ehud’s humanly contrived operation, it seems), but includes deliverance from the Philistines (Shamgar’s portfolio, 3:31)!

packing arrangements, 3:16), and who, without any obvious planning (unlike Ehud who seems to have meticulously orchestrated his multiple moves, 3:16–23), “also delivers Israel” (*like* Ehud, 3:15, for a change!). “He, *also*, delivered Israel” (3:31) is thus clearly ironic and an intended contrast with the laborious and manipulative (and godless) preparations and equipment of Ehud, not to mention his deceptive transactions. In other words, Shamgar is a *positive* foil for Ehud, a counter to the latter’s negative profile—his slipping downward from the Othniel-like norm.⁴⁸

Shamgar’s mini-narrative, by the way, is the only *minor* judge account that has a detail about how he went about his martial activity—with an unusual tool. Being the first of the minor judges, perhaps he—like Othniel, the first of the major judges—is a paragon and exemplar of these lesser leaders, though unlike for most of them, we have no clue about Shamgar’s biodata, marital status, children produced, death, or legacy.

SERMON FOCUS AND OUTLINES

THEOLOGICAL FOCUS OF PERICOPE 3 FOR PREACHING

3 Integrity, driven by reverence for God and reliance upon him, receives divine approbation (3:12–31).

The Theological Focus of this pericope is stated in the positive, though the example of Ehud is, of course, negative. While the pejorative notes will come through in the sermon, it is probably best to keep the focus positive.

Possible Preaching Outlines for Pericope 3

- I. Ehud’s Intrigue
 - Israel’s evildoing, punishment, idolatry (3:12–15, 19, 26)
 - Ehud, the son of the right hand, bound in his right hand (3:15)
 - Ehud’s duplicitous words and deceptive actions (3:16–23)
 - Move-to-relevance: How we tend to act without integrity⁴⁹
- II. God’s Interpretation
 - Yahweh’s absence
 - Ehud, another Joab

48. Another individual who used an unusual weapon is Jael; she, too, is non-Israelite; and she, like Shamgar, is a foil for the Israelite warrior who is the protagonist in her story—Barak.

49. The “Move-to-Relevance” here (and in other outlines) is intended to keep the sermon from becoming a lecture; it serves to connect with the audience, answering their implicit question “Why are we listening to this?” Unless such moves are made often and that question answered, the sermon will remain a detached endeavor for the most part, unrelated to the audience and adrift in a sea of words.

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Ehud's "going in" and "coming out" (3:19–24)

Ehud equated with excrement (3:22)

Shamgar's cameo (3:31)

Move-to-relevance: God's approval of integrity

III. Our Integrity: *Lead righteously!*

How to lead with integrity/righteousness⁵⁰

The Ehud story is, in my opinion, a perfect one to setup as a "single-move" sermon that points out the clues to the theological thrust as one goes along in the story. By the end of this creative retelling of the narrative that points out the clues to the theology of the pericope, the theological thrust should be clear to the listener (it may or may not be explicitly stated—that is the preacher's call). One can then move to application.⁵¹

I. Leader without Integrity

Israel's evildoing, punishment, idolatry (3:12–15, 19, 26)

Yahweh's absence

Ehud, the son of the right hand, bound in his right hand (3:15)

Ehud's duplicitous words and deceptive actions (3:16–23)

Move-to-relevance: How we tend to act

without integrity

Ehud's "going in" and "coming out" (3:19–24)

Ehud equated with excrement (3:22)

Shamgar's cameo (3:31)

Move-to-relevance: God's approval of integrity

II. *Lead with integrity!*

How to lead with integrity/righteousness

50. This may be a good time to refocus on the notion that *all* God's people are called to be leaders, to some degree, in some fashion, on some stage—home, office, school, marketplace. . . . Leading with integrity in whatever sphere one is called to, is an essential part of a godly, Christlike life.

51. Far too often, sermons with points/moves/chunks turn out not to be seamless. Chunks create clunks in the preaching, not always, but often. I generally try to make the moves seamless these days; in other words, I attempt to create "single-move" sermons rather than multi-move ones. The application, of course, should be made distinct, so that section may conceivably be a second move, as shown, though that seam could also very well be rendered imperceptible. Needless to say, moves-to-relevance must be made often even in such single-move exercises.