

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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God Saves in Surprising Ways

Judges 3:15-25, 29-30

Key verse: “When the Israelites cried out to the Lord, the Lord raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud son of Gera, the Benjaminite, a left-handed man” (Judges 3:15).

Hopeless. Have you ever watched the evening news and wondered if there is any hope? Economies failing; natural disasters bringing devastation; crime, war, and disease—all add up at times to what appears to be a hopeless situation. Have you ever felt hopeless about your own personal life? Perhaps financial loss, or family problems, or health issues make you wonder at times, “Is there any hope?”

If you have ever felt hopeless, then you can understand the mood of the Israelites during this period of their history. For 18 years, Israel had lived under the idolatrous and oppressive rule of the Moabites and their king, Eglon. Hope was in short supply. But finally deliverance came. How it came serves as a reminder to us all: Never give up hope. *God delivers His people from hopeless situations in surprising ways!*

In Ehud, God used an unlikely person to deliver Israel in a most unlikely way. Ehud was an unlikely person for God to use because, as the text is careful to point out, Ehud was a left-handed man from the tribe of Benjamin (v. 15). In ancient times, left-handedness was considered a disability. Furthermore, Benjamin means, ironically, “son of a right hand.” Yet, because Ehud was left-handed, he was able to conceal his short sword from the king’s guards by placing it on the side of his body where such a weapon would not normally be carried (v. 16). Ehud then used this sword to kill King Eglon and lead an uprising that would free Israel from the Moabites.

Judges 3:15-25, 29-30 describes these events. In addition to what has already been said about them above, two questions are important to consider:

1. *Why are some of the more grotesque details of these events included; for example, King Eglon’s obesity (v. 17) and the spilling of Eglon’s intestinal contents (v. 22)?* The name Eglon can be translated as “fat calf.” His obesity was probably seen as an expression of the king’s luxury and excess at the expense of Israel, who the king had oppressed. It seems likely that this story was first told and then written in a way meant to mock the enemy who had oppressed the people of Israel.

2. *Should the assassination of King Eglon be seen as morally acceptable?* The Bible gives no evidence that Christians today should follow Ehud's example. Many Christians believe that, at times, taking up arms for national defense may be justified. But that is not the point of this story from Judges. What God permitted or even used for His purposes in this pre-Christian era is not the last word on ethics for followers of Jesus today. The point of this story is not to present Ehud as a moral example. The point of the story is that God delivers His people from hopeless situations in surprising ways.

Who would have thought that God would deliver baby Moses from an early death by having Pharaoh's daughter rescue Moses and then hire his own mother to care for him? Who would have thought that God would use Rahab, the prostitute, to help Israel bring down the walls of Jericho? Most surprisingly, who would have thought that God would visit planet earth in the person of a carpenter from Nazareth and, at the cross, complete history's most important rescue mission?

There are times when life can seem pretty hopeless. In those times, we should remember that God delivers His people from hopeless situations in surprising ways. So, we can trust God, even when things look hopeless.

South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu is best known for his efforts to bring South Africa out of the oppressive system of racial apartheid and its painful legacy. Shortly after the publication in 2010 of his book, *Made for Goodness*, Tutu was asked this question: "After all you've seen and endured, are you really as optimistic as your book, *Made for Goodness*, says you are?"

Bishop Tutu answered: "I'm not optimistic, no. I'm quite different. I'm hopeful. I am a prisoner of hope. In the world, you have very bad people—Hitler, Idi Amin—and they look like they are going to win. All of them—all of them—have bitten the dust."

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