



We began our second sermon in Judges with the observation that, according to the writer Dale Ralph Davis, the beginning of Judges is like learning a board game and then seeing the first few games pan out as we meet each new generation.

1. Learning the ropes with Othniel (v7-11)

This first judge account is very to the point. It probably functions as a *paradigm story* – a worked example of how things were supposed to play out. But even in this short account we see that God is the chief player and the human characters are mere pawns.

2. The first full game with Ehud (v12-30)

- a sinful people (v12-14)

Despite having seen God's deliverance through Othniel, as soon as he died, the Israelites immediately fell back into sin and the LORD gave them to the Moabites.

- a merciful God (v15)

But God didn't desert them in their suffering. Upon their crying, he immediately sent them a deliverer. He rescued them.

- an impotent enemy (v16-25)

Next comes the rather gruesome black comedy of Ehud's assassination of Eglon, king of Moab. But what are we to make of such a story? Was Ehud obeying God's will? Briefly, we saw that the narrator holds his tongue (giving us no evaluative comments or speech from God); in a 'big picture' sense Ehud was obedient (having been raised up to deliver Israel from this evil king); and God seems strangely silent in this episode (not mentioned between v15 and v28), suggesting the assassination method was Ehud's idea rather than God's specific command.

While God doesn't clearly show us whether Ehud was right to dispose of Eglon like this, the big point of the passage seems to be that God's enemies will be resoundingly and definitively humiliated, just like Eglon.

- a decisive deliverance (v26-30)

The passage concludes with the Israelites uniting behind their newly recognised leader and God leading them to a decisive victory against the Moabites. In 3 different ways, in v29, the scale of their victory is made clear. God has well and truly delivered his people from his wicked enemies through Ehud.

3. A short and sweet game with Shamgar (v31)

We know almost nothing of Shamgar, except that he was most likely not an Israelite and that he saved Israel from the Philistines. Our God is a resourceful God, working through the least likely of people in the most surprising ways!

Here are a few questions you might want to use with your group...

1. How is it both an encouragement and a challenge to know that God is the chief player in human history, not human beings?
2. How do you feel about the Israelites' immediate turning away from God in v12? How is sin still a very real presence and threat in our lives?
3. How do we feel about God handing his people over to their enemies? Does this still happen to us as New Testament believers? If so, how?
4. How should we approach 'difficult' parts of Scripture like this? What can we embrace? What should we be careful of? What principles should we apply?
5. What are the themes of Ehud's story? How does God save Israel through Ehud?
6. Who might we say are God's enemies today? Why is it good news that God will ultimately definitively humiliate his enemies? How do we balance that with the command to love and pray for our enemies?
7. Does it matter who Shamgar is? Why/why not? What may be the point of this salvation interlude?