

# 104

## JUDGES 3:12-30

# A SNEAKY PLAN

### opening ILLUSTRATION

Bring a stack of note cards with you to class. As you prepare, consider some lighthearted “secret weapons” you use in your everyday life (such as, “I can drink a cup of hot coffee without sipping,” “I can make a perfect tiramisu,” “I can whistle in harmony,” or “I can ride a bicycle backward.”) Write each of these on a separate card. As your meeting begins, say something like, “You may not know this about me, but I have several secret weapons.” As you reveal each one, ask “In what situation might I need to use this?” and allow students to come up with humorous or fictitious scenarios. Give each student a note card and a pencil and invite them to write their own secret weapon. Invite a few volunteers to share what they wrote and the situation in which it might be helpful. Say, “The judge in our story today also had a secret weapon; it helped him conquer an oppressive king.”

### context

An understanding of the geography used in today’s passage will make this story more interesting. Israel is on the eastern border of the Mediterranean Sea, and it is known having for the Dead Sea to the south, the Sea of Galilee to the north, and the Jordan River running between them. The “City of Palms” (v. 13) is between the two seas, just west of the Jordan. Gilgal is thought to be northeast of Jericho and less than ten miles away. The land of Moab is east of the Jordan River, and when Ehud summoned helpers from the “hill country of Ephraim” (v. 27), they came from the higher-altitude west of Jericho. You may want to sketch this or find a map in a study Bible.

### expository OUTLINE

**JUDGES 3:12-15** *God is ready and willing to help, but we must cry out.* Some might read this passage and think, “Same song, new verse.” Yet again, the Israelites are doing evil. You’ll notice the author doesn’t even go into detail this time since we already know what the Israelites were guilty of: idolatry and sin. So to give them inspiration to turn back to Him, God allowed another foreign king, Eglon of Moab, to rule in Jericho, known as the City of Palms. Though we might think this foreign oppression would send them running back to God in repentance, we must remember how stick-necked and hard-hearted they were! They stayed subject to King Eglon for eighteen years! After a generation, they finally cried out to the Lord for help, and He had just the man for the job: Ehud, a left-handed Benjamite. God had appointed Him to deliver them; the stage is set as Ehud walks right into King Eglon’s dwelling place.

**JUDGES 3:16-25** *God equips His servants to accomplish the tasks He gives them.* If you can read this story without laughing, good job; it’s one of the funnier narratives in the Old Testament. But don’t miss how God used one man to upstage a powerful ruler. You see, left-handedness was rare then, just as now. So Ehud knew he could sneak in a sword if it was attached to his right thigh; right-handed men would have done the opposite. Ehud walked in to King Eglon, pretending to be the submissive servant to keep his ruling king from being angry. The king, obviously fooled by this man’s false obedience, sent his servants away so he could hear the “secret.” Ehud removed the concealed weapon, plunged it into the fat man’s belly, and the contents of his intestines spilled out. Gross? Totally. But it was a great plan. Ehud snuck out, and the servants, likely smelling something, assumed Eglon needed his privacy. As they waited awkwardly, Ehud escaped. Stories like this only happen in real life when God is the mastermind of the plan.

**JUDGES 3:26-30** *God calls His people to unite in obeying Him.* Ehud, alone, escaped from King Eglon’s dwelling. Running away, he sounded the ram’s horn, which drew out people from the “hill country of Ephraim” (v. 27). This was not people from the land that King Eglon had conquered, but it was still a tribe of Israel. These Ephraimites accepted Ehud as their leader and followed him down to the Jordan River, where they conquered their enemies as they tried to escape back to Moab. Just as God helped Ehud to be successful in His crazy plan to remove Eglon from power, God was also with the Ephraimite warriors; they were completely successful, no enemies escaping. One man’s bravery and obedience inspired others to be brave and obedient. The same can be true for us! Because of that day, and the effects of their faith, they lived in peace for eighty years. What a story!

## group DISCUSSION

The following are suggested discussion questions on each section of verses. They can be used for leading a small group session, or in sermon deliveries that include discussion.

### ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 3:12-15.

- .01** What phrase do you see repeated in verse 12? Why do you think that is in there two times? What might be a repeated phrase if a story of your life were being written?
- .02** Who gave King Eglon power over Israel? Why does God sometimes allow hard times in our lives, according to this verse?

### ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 3:16-25.

- .03** How can you see the hand of God in this passage, even though we don't see Him actually getting involved in the story?
- .04** What did Ehud say to King Eglon in verse 20? How was this actually God's message? Who has God sent to your life to deliver a message to you?

### ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 3:26-30.

- .05** What phrase do you notice in verses 19 and 26? What does that point to? What signs of this do we see in our world and culture?
- .06** Who in your group of Christian friends is brave in his or her faith? How can you support that friend to be braver? How can you be braver yourself?

## session CONNECTION

In Mark 6:30-44, we saw many needs from many different groups: the disciples needed rest and relaxation, the crowds needed compassion, the disciples needed to be challenged to minister, and everyone in the large crowd needed food. Jesus met all these needs. We see the love and compassion of Jesus, but we also see the obedience and humility of those who received His blessings. The same is true in Judges 3:12-30: God was ready and able to help His people, but it wasn't until they cried out to Him—after eighteen years of oppression by a foreign king—that He stepped in and helped them. We can never doubt God's love for us, but we can doubt our own obedience. Because of that, regularly assessing our hearts, minds, attitudes, and actions keeps us close to the Lord.

## application

Remind students of the secret weapons they identified in the opening illustration. Say, "Upon first reading the story of Ehud, we might think that his hand-to-hand combat skills, ability to devise a plan, or even his left-handedness was his secret weapon. But what gave him the victory, really?" Of course, Ehud would have had no success unless the Lord had been with him. Help students see that the same is true in their own lives: they can have all the intelligence, all the skills, all the athleticism, and all the ambition, but without God, they will not find success that matters according to His kingdom and His standards. Read Matthew 6:33 aloud and challenge students to seek and find Jesus as the first place in their hearts, minds, and lives.

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