

A HERO WILL RISE

The Book of Judges

Text

Judges 1:1-36

Topic

Against a backdrop of defeat, God gives a brief glimpse of the heroes He will raise-up to deliver His people

Title

"Did You Ever Know that You're God's Hero?"

Introduction

It's called the *Marvel Cinematic Universe*. They are the series of superhero films based on characters that appear in Marvel Comics. It started in 2008 with *Ironman*, and in that time Marvel Studios has produced fourteen films. There are twelve films more in various stages of production.

That doesn't count the X-Men franchise, or the *DC Comics Extended Universe* of films. Or the *Lego Batman Movie*, which is awesome.

We love our superheroes. They're mostly ordinary humans, and flawed at that. But they have been granted superpowers, and they rise to the occasion to save the day.

The Book of Judges tells the stories of a series of God's heroes (and one heroine). They are ordinary, flawed, human beings, but they arise with God's empowering to do extraordinary feats in order to save God's people. Samson immediately comes to mind. He was always doing some superhuman feat of strength - like removing the Gates of Gaza and then carrying them almost forty miles. Estimates of their weight, by conservative archaeologists, vary from a minimum of five-thousand pounds to over twenty-thousand pounds.

It's too bad God doesn't raise up heroes and heroines today. *Or does He?*

His Holy Spirit lives in you, does He not? The very Spirit that rose Jesus from the dead. One paraphrase of Romans 8:11 reads, "It stands to reason, doesn't it, that if the alive-and-present God who raised Jesus from the dead moves into your life, He'll do the same thing in you that He did in Jesus, bringing you alive to Himself?"

Like all superheroes, we have an arch-enemy. He's the devil, who the Bible calls the god of this world, and describes as going about like a beast, seeking to devour. Nevertheless we are told to resist him and he will flee from us.

You are God's hero; **you** are God's heroine. You can do all things through Jesus Christ Who strengthens you (Philippians 4:13). As we embark on our verse-by-verse study of the Book of Judges, keep your hero-status in mind.

I'll organize my thoughts about chapter one around two points: #1 You're God's Hero & Your Weakness Is To Disbelieve Him, and #2 You're God's Hero & Your Superpower Is To Believe Him.

#1 You're God's Hero & Your Weakness Is To Disbelieve Him

(v1-10 & 16-36)

I'll list the weakness, and you tell me the superhero it affects:

- Kryptonite (Superman).
- The color yellow (Green Lantern).
- Noise pollution (Daredevil).

What about us? What are our weaknesses? Each of us would have an extensive list of particular weaknesses.

One that is common to all of us is **disbelief**. I don't mean by that to suggest we are not saved. I'm talking about not taking God fully at His Word. We can disbelieve God in times of blessing, and in times of buffeting.

The Israelites in chapter one of Judges provide example after example for us of what disbelief looks, and acts, like.

Jdg 1:1 Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass that the children of Israel asked the LORD, saying, "Who shall be first to go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them?"

Scholars like Samuel for the author of the Book of Judges. It tells the mostly sordid story of the history of Israel after Joshua's death leading up to the establishing of a monarchy when Samuel anoints Saul as Israel's first king.

Warren Wiersbe describes the period by saying, "Instead of exhibiting spiritual fervor, Israel sank into *apathy*; instead of obeying the Lord, the people moved into *apostasy*; and instead of the nation enjoying law and order, the land was filled with *anarchy*."

Another commentator described it using the following wordplay: "Rebellion, retribution, repentance, restoration, and rest."

It's perhaps best summed-up by the last verse in the book, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (21:25).

Whenever Israel repented, and cried-out the Lord, He would raise-up a judge - **a hero** - to deliver them. We'll see twelve of them.

Joshua led the Israelites to a victory that secured their control of the land. But there were still Canaanites living there, who needed to be defeated; and that would be the responsibility of each tribe in its own inheritance.

The children of Israel "asked the Lord, saying, "Who shall be first to go up for us against the Canaanites to fight against them?" So far, so good.

Jdg 1:2 And the LORD said, "Judah shall go up. Indeed I have delivered the land into his hand."

God indicated, probably through the inquiry of the high priest, that the tribe of Judah should go. He promised to "deliver the land into his hand."

Jdg 1:3 So Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me to my allotted territory, that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I will likewise go with you to your allotted territory." And Simeon went with him.

Did you hear God mention Simeon? This may have seemed like a good idea; but it was not God's idea.

For one thing, God is all about showing that it's not by might, nor by power, but by His Spirit, that He works. Teaming up with Simeon was a show of physical, not spiritual, strength.

Our first look at disbelief reminds us it is subtle. God is your strength, but you add some 'Simeon' to His leading, thus diminishing Him in the process. Strength doesn't come in padding the numbers, but in simple faith.

Jdg 1:4 Then Judah went up, and the LORD delivered the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand; and they killed ten thousand men at Bezek.

Right now might be a good time to address a criticism some folks level at God. How can He order the wholesale killing of the inhabitants of Canaan?

First of all, before God ordered their extinction, **He called for their eviction.** He would have been content to see them leave. The Canaanites knew, for at least four hundred years, that the Israelites would one day come to claim their land. They therefore had plenty of time to leave.

Secondly, *they could have gotten saved*. In their first foray into the land, against Jericho, you see Rahab and her family saved and spared.

God was not willing any should perish; but they must either evacuate, or convert.

Choosing to stay was a conscious choice to defy the wrath of God against them. The Canaanites were heinous, immoral sinners - practicing all manner of sexual perversion, as well as child sacrifice. God's wrath was His last resort, but it was deserved.

Judah and Simeon were victorious... Sort of. They won the battle, but they did it their way, not God's. For example we next read,

Jdg 1:5 And they found Adoni-Bezek in Bezek, and fought against him; and they defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites.
Jdg 1:6 Then Adoni-Bezek fled, and they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes.
Jdg 1:7 And Adoni-Bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off used to gather scraps under my table; as I have done, so God has repaid me." Then they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.

This was terrible. And wrong. God hadn't told them to maim their enemies. This was, as you see in these verses, a pagan custom.

Adoni-Bezek got a false picture of God from the maiming. It seemed that the God of Israel was no different than his god, Baal. They both maimed their enemies.

Disbelief manifested itself here as misrepresenting God. It's important how we represent God to others. He is like no other.

Jdg 1:8 Now the children of Judah fought against Jerusalem and took it; they struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire.

Jdg 1:9 And afterward the children of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who dwelt in the mountains, in the South, and in the lowland.

Jdg 1:10 Then Judah went against the Canaanites who dwelt in Hebron. (Now the name of Hebron was formerly Kirjath Arba.) And they killed Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi.

For a time, Judah went about God's business exactly as they should have. God delivered their enemies into their hand.

This tells us that we can experience blessings even though we have been only partially obedient. We mustn't confuse blessings with obedience, because God graciously blesses us despite our shortcomings.

(Skip down to verse sixteen).

Jdg 1:16 Now the children of the Kenite, Moses' father-in-law, went up from the City of Palms with the children of Judah into the Wilderness of Judah, which lies in the South near Arad; and they went and dwelt among the people.

Earlier Moses had invited the Kenites to join the Israelites because of his relationship to them by marriage. Although they joined the Israelites, they did not join in the conquest, but rather chose to live among the Canaanites. Eventually they became "Canaanized" and were indistinguishable from those who rejected God.

Some people in the church are in disbelief because they are not saved. They might volunteer, and seem to be used by God; but it's not God's empowering. They don't belong to God.

If you are here, and not a Christian - *it's why you are here*. Today you can be saved.

Jdg 1:17 And Judah went with his brother Simeon, and they attacked the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath, and utterly destroyed it. So the name of the city was called Hormah.

Jdg 1:18 Also Judah took Gaza with its territory, Ashkelon with its territory, and Ekron with its territory.

Jdg 1:19 So the LORD was with Judah. And they drove out the mountaineers, but they could not drive out the inhabitants of the lowland, because they had chariots of iron.

"Could not" means *did not* when they *could have*. Don't you think God knew about the "chariots of iron" back in verse two when He promised to deliver their enemies into their hand?

We will encounter one woman hero, Deborah. She will instruct Israel to go against a superior force of nine hundred chariots of iron, to emerge victorious by believing God.

Superiority of any kind is not an issue when you believe God and are obeying Him.

Disbelief here manifested itself as flat-out disobedience. Probably a little pride was involved. They must have attributed some or much of their success to their own strength and strategies, because now, faced with a seemingly superior foe, they did not trust God.

Jdg 1:20 And they gave Hebron to Caleb, as Moses had said. Then he expelled from there the three sons of Anak.

Caleb - while an old man - conquered a difficult mountain region by expelling three giants. It was not by might... Nor by power... But by his simply believing in God.

The chapter ends with a rapid series of failures.

Jdg 1:21 But the children of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem; so the Jebusites dwell with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

Maybe the Benjamites thought they could convert the Jebusites. Didn't happen, but the Jebusites did pervert the Benjamites.

An example today might be a Christian knowingly marrying a nonbeliever.

Disbelief is manifested here by compromise, rather than conquest.

Jdg 1:22 And the house of Joseph also went up against Bethel, and the LORD was with them.

Jdg 1:23 So the house of Joseph sent men to spy out Bethel. (The name of the city was formerly Luz.)

Jdg 1:24 And when the spies saw a man coming out of the city, they said to him, "Please show us the entrance to the city, and we will show you mercy."

Jdg 1:25 So he showed them the entrance to the city, and they struck the city with the edge of the sword; but they let the man and all his family go.

Jdg 1:26 And the man went to the land of the Hittites, built a city, and called its name Luz, which is its name to this day.

If "the Lord was with them," why the need for spies? "Well," you say, "Joshua sent spies to Jericho, and that turned out great."

Let's compare the results:

- The spies sent to Jericho preached the Gospel, and Rahab and her family were gloriously saved.
- The spies sent to Bethel made a deal with the man, sent him on his way, so he could establish a brand new godless city.

Besides, who needs an "entrance" into the city? God destroyed Jericho miraculously, not depending on its blueprints to discover its weakness.

Disbelief manifested itself here by trusting in natural means and methods; and in impatience with waiting upon God for further details.

Jdg 1:27 However, Manasseh did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shean and its villages, or Taanach and its villages, or the inhabitants of Dor and its villages, or the inhabitants of Ibleam and its villages, or the inhabitants of Megiddo and its villages; for the Canaanites were determined to dwell in that land.

Jdg 1:28 And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites under tribute, but did not completely drive them out.

The Canaanites were more determined to stay than the tribe of Manasseh was determined to obey God. It was just easier to live alongside them.

No one said the Christian life was going to be easy. Plenty of godly voices, in Scripture, have told us its going to be hard - a battle. Thus we must remain determined - to believe God in the face of opposition.

Nothing fosters disbelief quite so much as troubles and suffering.

The "tribute" idea may have sounded good, but it wasn't God's Word or His will. Disbelief adds to the Word of God, and thereby undermines His will from being accomplished.

Jdg 1:29 Nor did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites who dwelt in Gezer; so the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them.

Jdg 1:30 Nor did Zebulun drive out the inhabitants of Kitron or the inhabitants of Nahalol; so the Canaanites dwelt among them, and were put under tribute.

This "tribute" strategy caught-on. In a very bad way. When I manifest disbelief by disobedience, it encourages others to do the same. I might seem successful, but that's never the point.

Jdg 1:31 Nor did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Acco or the inhabitants of Sidon, or of Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik, or Rehob.

Jdg 1:32 So the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out.

The wording makes it sound like the Canaanites were doing the Asherites a favor by letting them dwell among them. That was a total reversal of what God intended.

Disbelief manifested itself here as surrender to the surrounding culture and its values. Compromise leads to surrender.

Jdg 1:33 Nor did Naphtali drive out the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh or the inhabitants of Beth Anath; but they dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land. Nevertheless the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh and Beth Anath were put under tribute to them.

Commentators say these places were centers of Canaanite worship. The Canaanites were all too happy to corrupt the Israelites by introducing them to Baal worship.

We manifest disbelief if we borrow methods of worship from false sources. Sadly, to make worship 'fresh,' churches often borrow from the world, or other religions. In recent years prayer has taken a hit, as churches established labyrinths for their members to walk through, stopping to contemplate words and objects. It's cultic.

Jdg 1:34 And the Amorites forced the children of Dan into the mountains, for they would not allow them to come down to the valley;

Jdg 1:35 and the Amorites were determined to dwell in Mount Heres, in Aijalon, and in Shaalbim; yet when the strength of the house of Joseph became greater, they were put under tribute.

Jdg 1:36 Now the boundary of the Amorites was from the Ascent of Akrabbim, from Sela, and upward.

The tribe of Dan was defeated, "forced... into the mountains."

When Joshua was defeated at Ai, he sought the Lord. God revealed to him there was sin in the camp. Achan had taken some of the spoil, against the expressed will of God.

The Danite's were defeated, but simply accepted their plight. They didn't want to do the hard work necessary to get right with God.

Disbelief here manifested itself as laziness.

You're a hero; you're a heroine. You have to believe it, against what seem to be overwhelming odds, and God's unexplained delays.

You've been promised victory, but it seems you are defeated. The enemy has come in to rob and kill and steal. The very ground beneath you has turned to quicksand.

It might be hard to believe, but disbelief is only going to make things worse. You should adopt as your theme the song by Journey, *Don't Stop Believing*.

Maybe we need an example of what the Israelites should have done. We saw part of it, with Caleb. There's a little more to it.

#2 You're God's Hero & Your Superpower Is To Believe Him

(v11-15)

Decades earlier the Israelites had stood on the verge of entering the Promised Land at Kadesh Barnea. Moses sent twelve men in to spy-out the land.

Ten of the spies exaggerated the dangers and difficulties. Joshua and Caleb gave a good report and urged the people to press forward and by faith conquer the land. They were outnumbered and overruled.

Because of their disbelief, the Lord told the Israelites that the entire generation over the age of twenty would never enter the Promised Land. The Israelites were made to wander in the wilderness for nearly forty years while that generation died.

Joshua and Caleb were the exceptions. After the forty years they would enter the land and receive their inheritance.

Caleb wanted the land he had spied out and was promised to him. In one sense it was the worst land because it was the most difficult to conquer. It was mountainous terrain which always put an attacker at a disadvantage.

The cities were heavily fortified - again a tremendous disadvantage to their conquest. And it was there that a concentration of giants lived - the very giants that had so filled the ten spies and the Israelites with fear forty-five years earlier.

We read that Caleb conquered his land, but there is something more.

Jdg 1:11 From there they went against the inhabitants of Debir. (The name of Debir was formerly Kirjath Sepher.)

Jdg 1:12 Then Caleb said, "Whoever attacks Kirjath Sepher and takes it, to him I will give my daughter Achsah as wife."

Jdg 1:13 And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, took it; so he gave him his daughter Achsah as wife.

This might seem strange, at first, but it's really very basic parenting. Dads, don't you want most, for your daughters, that they marry a solid, committed Christian? That's all Caleb wanted, and the times in which he lived required you prove your belief in God by believing God and conquering your land.

In chapter three of Judges we will see Othniel raised-up as a judge - as a hero - to deliver God's people. This episode in chapter one is a sort of pre-judge training by Caleb.

Jdg 1:14 Now it happened, when she came to him, that she urged him to ask her father for a field. And she dismounted from her donkey, and Caleb said to her, "What do you wish?"

Jdg 1:15 So she said to him, "Give me a blessing; since you have given me land in the South, give me also springs of water." And Caleb gave her the upper springs and the lower springs.

On a practical level, a "field" with no water was useless. Achsah wanted the water rights. She asked and Caleb gave her more than she asked for.

The fact he gave her more indicated he wanted them to ask for the field and for the water rights. So why not just give it to them from the start?

I think that Caleb was an example to them, and to us. A spiritual example. If they wanted anything from their dad, all they had to do was ask, and he would give them not just what they asked for, but much more.

Sound like any dad you know? Maybe this will help:

Luke 11:11 If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish?

Luke 11:12 Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?

Luke 11:13 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

Your heavenly Father wants to give you the good gift of the Holy Spirit in abundance.

God the Holy Spirit is compared to springs of water. Jesus said,

John 7:37 ... "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.

John 7:38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

John 7:39 But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive...

In the Luke passage Jesus was talking about believers who have already been born-again asking for more of the Holy Spirit in their lives. In John we're promised the influence and presence of the Spirit will be like rivers of living water flowing into, through, and out from us.

We have water rights. We need only believe that as we ask, we receive - every good and spiritual resource we need to conquer.

The heroes and the heroine of the Book of Judges will be empowered by God the Holy Spirit. He will temporarily come upon them, and they will deliver God's people.

He's in us, **permanently**; and He's promised to continually come upon us, if we simply ask, believing by faith.

Your superpower is to believe God. Believe Him no matter how dark things seem, right now. No matter how overwhelming your enemy.

Take your stand, in the field of battle, and let the Lord flow through you.

