

# A HERO WILL RISE

The Book of Judges

Text

Judges 2:11-3:6

Topic

God tells the Israelites they are living like harlots when they could be living like heroes

Title

*"Yo, ho, Yo ho, a Heroes Life for Me"*

## Introduction

Shiver me timbers, you haven't missed it. *International Talk Like a Pirate Day* is September 19th. In anticipation, I went to the online pirate-name generator, and put in my name to find my pirate name.

My pirate name is John "Bearded Beast" Noon, *The Knave of Flying Fish Sands!*

Let's get it out of our system right now, and utter a collective, "Arrrrgh."

We're fascinated by tales of pirates, all the more since the popularity of the Disney movies, and Captain Jack Sparrow.

When we think of pirates our imagination flies to the Spanish Main, or to the Caribbean - maybe even to Neverland.

We all know it wasn't really glamorous. Listen to this description of the pirates' life:

... conditions aboard even the cleanest and best-equipped ship became quickly unsavory when the sweaty and unwashed crew had sailed a week or two... While the captain's cabin was palatial compared to the rest of the ship (almost big enough to stand up in), most crewmembers had to bunk in cramped and squalid conditions, or swing in flea-swarmed hammocks. The food was at best bland and at worst rancid, bilge-soaked, or rendered inedible by rats, mildew, or weevils. The unsanitary conditions and poor nutrition made the ships into breeding grounds for disease. Didn't you ever wonder where the phrase "scurvy rascal" came from?

"Piracy" refers to acts of violent crime committed at sea (but can also include on land and air).

Have you ever heard the complete lyrics to *A Pirate's Life for Me*?

*We pillage and plunder, we rifle and loot... We kidnap and ravage and don't give a hoot...*

*We extort and pilfer, we filch and sack... Maraud and embezzle and even hijack...*

*We kindle and char and inflame and ignite... We burn up the city, we're really a fright...*

*We're rascals and scoundrels, we're villains and knaves... We're devils and black sheep, we're really bad eggs...*

*We're beggars and blighters and ne'er do-well cads...  
Aye, but we're loved by our mummies and dads,*

*Drink up me 'earties, yo ho.*

**Our perception of piracy is a romantic fantasy.** It's a terrible, destructive life, that ruins both pirate and victim. The Tom Hanks film, *Captain Phillips*, gives a truer depiction of pirates. In the film's final scenes, you can't wait for the Navy seals to execute their orders and take those guys out with perfectly coordinated head shots.

In the Book of Judges, the children of Israel had a romantic fantasy of life among the Canaanite people. Their enemies ate whatever they wanted, had lots of indiscriminate sex with the approval of their gods, enjoyed gratuitous violence, and seemed not to have a care in the world. They pillaged and plundered, and were really bad eggs.

*"Yo ho, yo ho, the Canaanite life for me!"* could have been the Hebrew anthem.

Ah, but like the pirate life, the Canaanite life wasn't all that it seemed. The Jews who pursued it were the ones left "plundered" and "despoiled" and "distressed."

**God described them as harlots.** We're going to read, in verse seventeen, "they played the **harlot** with other gods."

Spiritually speaking, they were committing adultery against God. The Canaanite life was a harlot's life.

Instead of a harlot's life, God intended His children to live a hero's life.

That's what we will see contrasted in these verses: harlots and heroes. I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 The Harlot Life Leads You To Ruin, and #2 The Hero Life Leaves You At Rest.

## #1 The Harlot Life Leads You To Ruin

(2:11-15, 20-23 & 3:1-6)

Because He depicted Himself as their husband, when Israel worshipped idols, it was spiritual adultery.

Notwithstanding the romanticized, even whimsical, depictions of harlots in movies, and in Amsterdam, it's a life of being "plundered" and "despoiled" and "distressed."

Jdg 2:11 Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals;

The "evil" was deliberate. They compared the covenant God had made with them to the carnality of Canaan, and they preferred Canaan to the Creator.

We typically say that they worshipped Baal, but that term is really a title, meaning "master" or "lord," and can refer to many different gods.

Baal was most often identified with the god of weather. The female companion of Baal was Astarte, whose plural form occurs in our text as Ashtoreths.

Again, this term represented many localized forms of the goddess but was most often identified with fertility.

Baal and Astarte needed to have sex - and lots of it - in order for the Canaanites to be guaranteed good crops. Apparently, they were reluctant partners, and needed coaxing. They were coaxed by watching Canaanites have sex - and lots of it. These orgies usually took place in elevated areas close to the clouds, where the gods could better hear and better see the humans. They were called "high places."

One historian made the following observations:

Canaanite worship was socially destructive. Its religious acts were pornographic and sick, seriously damaging to children, creating early impressions of deities with no interest in moral behavior. It tried to dignify, by the use of religious labels, depraved acts of bestiality and corruption. It had a low estimate of human life. It suggested that anything was permissible, promiscuity, murder or anything else, in order to guarantee a good crop at harvest. It ignored the highest values both in the family and in the wider community - love, loyalty, purity, peace and security - and encouraged the view that all these things were inferior to material prosperity, physical satisfaction and human pleasure. A society where those things matter most is self-destructive.

Also "damaging to children" was the practice the Bible calls "walking through the fire." It was child sacrifice, burning children to death.

Jdg 2:12 and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger.

They knew about God, having been taught by their parents. Theirs was a willful, deliberate forsaking of their upbringing in order to pursue other gods.

It's no comfort to the parents of prodigals to tell them that it isn't their fault, because it doesn't change the situation. But it's true, nonetheless. Your children must grow-up and make their own decision to follow the Lord.

The Canaanites were "all around them" because they refused to conquer them, and drive them out. You know that saying, "keep your friends close, and your enemies closer?" It doesn't apply to spiritual enemies.

Jdg 2:13 They forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.

This tells us, specifically, that they were engaging in the perverse sexual rituals whose purpose was to arouse Baal and Astarte.

Jdg 2:14 And the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel. So He delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies.

Here is a language tidbit. The word for "anger" in the Bible is the word for "nose," or "nostrils." When someone is angry, their nostrils flare out. Think of the classic cartoon of the angry dragon breathing fire.

Thus we read, of God, in Psalm 18:8, "smoke went up from His nostrils."

I don't need to explain that God can be angry, do I? It's a righteous anger, against sin, on account of its destruction.

God does not become angry because of the heat of the moment or because He possesses a confusing, constantly fluctuating personality. God's anger is rational. It is His direct, calculated response to sin.

His anger also stems from a holy jealousy. God is jealous over His people, in a good way, to keep them secure, and spiritual.

God "delivered them into the hands of plunderers who despoiled them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies all around." It sounds harsh, but consider this:

- Those plunderers were there *precisely because the Israelites refused to drive them out.*
- Their enemies were there *precisely because they failed to conquer them, as they were commanded to.*

God let the consequences of their disobedience and sin run their course.

Jdg 2:15 Wherever they went out, the hand of the LORD was against them for calamity, as the LORD had said, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were greatly distressed.

They were defeated on all sides, by all forces, in all of their endeavors.

Jdg 2:20 Then the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and He said, "Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not heeded My voice,

God calls the Israelites "this nation." It's the same way He would refer to any nation; to all Gentile nations. He wasn't disowning them; He was emphasizing just how far they had transgressed.

If you were a visitor from outer space, you'd see no difference between a Jew and a Gentile.

Christians have a reputation for being against things. While that can turn into legalism, when I think it makes me more spiritual, we nevertheless must stand-out from the world. If not because of the things we are against, then certainly for the things we are for: Mercy and love and peace. The hope of Jesus' coming. Compassion toward the lost.

Jdg 2:21 I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died,

Jdg 2:22 so that through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the LORD, to walk in them as their fathers kept them, or not."



The "nations which Joshua left when he died" were not a stain on his record. He had put the twelve tribes in a position, strategically, to finish the conquest. Each tribe was responsible for its own conquest of their inheritance. We read in chapter one how they fell short, and failed.

We see something of God's foresight. He knew that the tribes would, for the next three hundred years, repeat a cycle of rebellion, retribution, repentance, and rest. He knew that after He delivered them, each time they'd go right back into rebellion.

It was to "test" them that He left the nations they had failed to expel. Tests have gotten a bad name. We generally don't like them; or we say they are not an accurate measure.

Think of it this way. A while back I talked about what are called "perishable skills." They are abilities that need regular reinforcement through training and testing. In law enforcement and the fire services, they are the skills needed to do the job with excellence. The police and fire departments therefore provide on-going training for their people.

It's ill-advised to pass-up perishable skills training and testing, because it literally is a matter of life and death. It readies you, and keeps you sharp.

Jdg 2:23 Therefore the LORD left those nations, without driving them out immediately; nor did He deliver them into the hand of Joshua.

Joshua gave the order to finish the conquest. If there was fault to be found in his leadership, it was in believing that the tribes would execute his orders.

This verse sounds a little melancholy. Joshua, old and advanced in years, must have realized that the tribes weren't zealous about finishing strong.

Jdg 3:1 Now these are the nations which the LORD left, that He might test Israel by them, that is, all who had not known any of the wars in Canaan

Jdg 3:2 (this was only so that the generations of the children of Israel might be taught to know war, at least those who had not formerly known it),

Looking down through the "generations," and knowing they would transgress, the Lord exercised His providence over the nations, to use them to test their perishable skills.

God's providence is His working within human history to accomplish His will, but without violating our free will. These nations would oppress the Jews, but it was their own bent to do so. God was not the author of their evil, but He could utilize it to discipline Israel.

The Jews chose the Canaanite life, so He let them experience it, and that included being victimized by it.

The author of Judges, we think Samuel, lists the nations:

Jdg 3:3 namely, five lords of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites who dwelt in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal Hermon to the entrance of Hamath.

The list is geographical. It points in all four directions: southeast (Canaanites), northeast (Hivites), northwest (Sidonians), and southwest (Philistines). They were surrounded in such a way that there was no escaping - only help from God.

Jdg 3:4 And they were left, that He might test Israel by them, to know whether they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.

We talked quite a lot, last time, about the responsibility of each generation to know the Lord for themselves. God has no grandchildren.

Jdg 3:5 Thus the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

Jdg 3:6 And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons; and they served their gods.

Have you ever gotten an "F" on a test? Or for an entire class? The twelve tribes flunked, generation after generation, for about three centuries, from Joshua's death to the appointment of Saul as Israel's first king. The judges God raised-up were the momentary exceptions to their failure.

Their failure followed a progression. First, they "dwelt among" their enemies, rather than rising-up to drive them out.

"Wait," you object; "I thought God refused to drive them out?" True, God didn't allow them to be totally eradicated. But as we will see when the judges are introduced, the tribes could have defeated their enemies, and lived without their influence.

Second, "they took their daughters to be their wives," a thing strictly forbidden by God's Law. Don't get the wrong idea; if these ladies would have converted to Judaism then they would have been marry-able. Think Ruth, who was a Moabite, but nevertheless married Boaz, and is in the genealogy of Jesus.

God is not against what we call inter-racial marriages, but He **is** against your being unequally yoked to a nonbeliever of any race or ethnicity.

The they-never-converted-to-Judaism problem is explained in verse six as, "and they served their gods." That brings us full circle, and back to the high places and orgies.

"They played the harlot with other gods" (2:17). They chose to be harlots, spiritual harlots.

Regarding ourselves, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, depicts Himself as our heavenly Bridegroom, and we as His bride. In the Book of James we are warned to not be spiritual adulterers and adulteresses by becoming too friendly with the world.

The standard is a little higher for us. We don't need to be actively worshipping idols - just being too friendly, in general, with the world is a problem. We shouldn't even be flirting with the things of the world.

Just as I wrote that last sentence, this quote from Charles Spurgeon was messaged to my phone: "The superlative beauty of Jesus is all-attracting; it is not so much to be admired as to be loved."

A million years ago we used to sing, *I keep falling in love with Him over-and-over and over-and-over again.*

Have any of us strayed from our first love? Return to it.

## #2 The Hero Life Leaves You At Rest

(2:16-19)

Chapter two, and the first few verses of chapter three, are a preview of things to come in the following pages of Judges. Israel would constantly fail, but under God's loving discipline, they would cry-out to God for help. Although they didn't deserve it, He always heard and heeded their cries.

Each time God would raise-up a judge, a hero, who He would empower to overpower Israel's enemies, and deliver them.

Any Israelite - man or woman - could have been a judge. We will see that not all of them were super-spiritual, but all of them were simply available.

When I see a judge, I see that the Jews could have chosen the hero life for themselves. In one sense, all of them could have lived like judges - conquering territory, and expelling enemies.

They could all have been like Caleb, for example, pressing forward into his territory, expecting victory over the giants facing him.

Let's read these next few verses with that in mind.

**Jdg 2:16 Nevertheless, the LORD raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them.**

"Nevertheless" sounds almost nonchalant, and that is what makes it full of meaning. First of all, despite their not deserving it, "nevertheless" God "delivered them."

You can't earn God's help, but if you're a child of His, you can expect it whenever you agree with Him, and repent.

Second, no matter your plight, "nevertheless" God can easily deliver you from it. His power to save is legendary. It is on display in the Bible from the Garden of Eden through the creation of the new heavens and the new earth in the Revelation.

Now having said both of those things, and knowing them to be true, I struggle with why I am sometimes surrounded still by suffering or sorrow, trouble or trial. It seems my distresses are not relieved or removed.

If it's so easy for God, then why does my life seem so hard?

It's because He sometimes delivers me through my circumstances, not from them. He wants to empower me to represent Him in midst of my pain. And that is a much harder thing - not for God, but for me.

It's perishable skills training that He deems necessary.

God *will* deliver me - but it might be after a long time, or even ultimately, when I see Him face-to-face.

Job is the quintessential example of suffering, is he not? Scholars estimate his period of being afflicted with boils and such lasted a few months. Then he was delivered, and what he had lost was restored "twice as much as he had before" (42:10).

But let's be observant of his sufferings. The loss of his children at the very beginning of his story... Did that pain last a few months? Was it alleviated by having more children afterward?

Job was delivered through a severe ordeal - and some of it lasted his entire lifetime.

Regardless my circumstances, I am God's hero, and should choose the hero life of standing on His promises in the midst of my storm, and giving testimony to His faithfulness.

Jdg 2:17 Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the LORD; they did not do so.

Jdg 2:18 And when the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them.

Jdg 2:19 And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.

They looked to the Lord to raise-up judges, and that was great. But they could have looked to the Lord to each live as a judge.

The stories in the Book of Judges aren't meant to teach us that there are only occasional, super-spiritual believers, while most of us struggle to barely make it through each day.

Quite the opposite is true. Each of us is indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. We are each commanded to go on being filled with the Spirit. The power to serve the Lord, with boldness, seems renewable every day.

Our "inheritance," our territory, isn't land in Canaan. Our enemies aren't the "the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites."

We war against "principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

Your territory is whatever circumstances you find yourself in. Press forward, in the power of the Spirit. In those times you seem more a zero, than a hero, be comforted by these words of Job:

Job 23:8 "Look, I go forward, but He is not there, And backward, but I cannot perceive Him;

Job 23:9 When He works on the left hand, I cannot behold Him; When He turns to the right hand, I cannot see Him.

Job 23:10 But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.

Job 23:11 My foot has held fast to His steps; I have kept His way and not turned aside.

Job 23:12 I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth More than my necessary food."