

# A HERO WILL RISE

The Book of Judges

Text

Judges 3:7-31

Topic

Ehud thrusts his dagger deep into the stomach of fat King Eglon then goes on to rally Israel to defeat the Moabites

Title

*"The Way to the King's Hurt is Through His Stomach"*

Introduction

It was a dark and dangerous period in China's often mysterious history. The rebel Tai Lung had escaped after being incarcerated for twenty years. He was bent on returning to the Valley, to claim the title and authority that he believed was rightfully his.

The last line of defense against him was a small group of warriors, whose Chinese name translates roughly into English as, *The Furious Five*.

After an epic confrontation on a rope bridge called the Thread of Hope, Tai Lung was undefeated, and still bent on conquest.

Making his way to the Jade Palace, who could stop him from claiming the title of Dragon Warrior?

Only one - **Po, the King fu panda.**

(You had enough clues to realize I was talking about the 2008 DreamWorks animated film).

Po the panda, voiced by Jack Black, was a most unlikely hero. We are captivated by unlikely heroes, because they encourage us to think that any one of us could be the hero, or the heroine, of some important tale.

In the Book of Judges, we are introduced to a series of eleven men, and one woman, who are raised-up by God to deliver Israel from their oppressors.

The judges are unlikely heroes. God wants to encourage you and I, not that He can raise-up a hero for us, *but that **we** each are His hero or heroine.*

Three chapters in, we finally meet a hero in the book; we meet a trio of heroes, in fact. They are Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar.

First we see Othniel, whose heroics we might subtitle, "*Eight is Enough*"

(v7-11)

In these verses we're going to get a preview of the cycle of rebellion, retribution, repentance, restoration, and rest that will repeat itself for three hundred years.

With apologies to Dickens, "It was the worst of times; it was the best of times." First, it was the worst of times:

Jdg 3:7 So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs.

They "forgot the Lord their God." Here are four examples from the Bible of how we forget God:

1. We can forget God by ignoring His past works for us: "Then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery (Deuteronomy 6:12).
2. We can forget God by believing lies instead of the Word of God: "This is your lot, the portion I have measured out to you, declares the Lord, because you have forgotten me and trusted in lies" (Jeremiah 13:25).
3. We can forget God by going after other gods: "And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals when she burned offerings to them and adorned herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers and forgot me, declares the Lord" (Hosea 2:13).
4. We can forget God when we are satisfied with material prosperity: "But when they had grazed, they became full, they were filled, and their heart was lifted up; therefore they forgot me" (Hosea 13:6).

All of these described Israel, but mostly their going after the gods of the Canaanites, represented as "the Baals and Asherahs."

Jdg 3:8 Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the children of Israel served Cushan-Rishathaim eight years.

There's a saying attributed to the Texas Rangers: "You ride with outlaws, you die with outlaws." The Israelites wanted to be like Canaanites, so God let them be treated like Canaanites - who were notorious for warring against one another, and enslaving one another.

They "served... eight years," but it must have seemed much longer. In this first case, *eight was enough*.

Jdg 3:9 When the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the children of Israel, who delivered them: Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother.

We met Othniel in chapter one. Caleb offered his daughter in marriage to the man who would conquer Kirjath Sepher. Reading between the lines, Caleb was making sure whoever married his precious daughter was a believer who was walking with the Lord by faith.

Nothing negative is written about Othniel. He had already proven himself spiritually. But before you think that being spiritual was a prerequisite for being a judge, think again. The last judge, Samson, is about as opposite Othniel as you can get; but he, too, was a hero God raised-up.

Looking at all the judges, one commentator noted, "The progression downward, even in Israel's leaders, is clear."

It's better for you to be spiritual, because you will have closer fellowship with God. But you never need to wait, to become more spiritual, to be used of God. God can use you right now, right where you are, as His hero or heroine.

Don't be looking for a hero; be him, or her. You can be the hero, because of what we next read.

Jdg 3:10 The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD delivered Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-Rishathaim.

The very first hero reveals to us the secret for all subsequent heroes: "the Spirit of the Lord." In the book of Judges, we will see the Spirit "coming upon" the various judges whom God raised up to deliver Israel from their oppressors.

It is beyond the scope of our text, but I should say something about how the Holy Spirit worked with believers in the Old Testament. Obviously men and women were saved by the Spirit; but since there is no comprehensive picture of how He worked in their hearts, theologians tend to disagree about the details.

For one thing, there is no promise in the Old Testament to the believer that he will be permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Some scholars argue that He did indwell them; others say He did not. I tend to think He did not - although it's not a hill I'd choose to die on.

The Spirit definitely "came upon" Old Testament believers, to empower them to perform certain tasks. It wasn't a matter of their faith. When we read their stories, it's obvious that the men and women did not expect the Spirit of God to come upon them, nor did they do anything to prompt it. It just happened, by the sovereign choice of God.

The Spirit's coming upon men in the Old Testament was not always the same:

- In the case of Israel's first king, Saul, the Spirit that was given to him was also taken from him when the kingdom was taken away.
- With Samson, the Spirit came upon him only at certain times.

The New Testament teaches the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit in believers (First Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20). When we place our faith in Christ for salvation, the Holy Spirit comes to live within us. Our physical bodies, and the corporate "body" of believers, is His called His temple.

We go on in the New Testament to read that believers can be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), and they can be baptized with the Spirit (Acts 2).

We are, in fact, commanded to go on being filled with the Holy Spirit. You can't continue something unless you start out that way. We must, therefore, **start the Christian life full of the Holy Spirit.**

If you were converted as an adult, you heard the Gospel, and were saved. He took up residence in you. You discovered immediately that you were also full of the Spirit - manifested by experiencing His power. You were set free from addictions; your language dramatically changed; you had love for your enemies, and compassion for the lost. Things like that are typical of conversions.

Converts are to go on being filled, to walk continuously in this power. Jesus said it would be like a torrential flow of water into, and out of, your heart.

One theologian says of our experience with God the Holy Spirit that it is "dynamic and renewable."

That statement squares with the exhortation of Jesus that we go on asking, seeking, and knocking for the Holy Spirit, all the while believing by faith that our Heavenly Father will not withhold His power (Luke 11:13).

Maybe you weren't converted as an adult, but were saved from childhood. All this talk of the Holy Spirit's power is foreign to you.

Or maybe you've attended churches that either downplayed the experience of the power of the Holy Spirit, or they put Him on display as a force that takes control of you, forcing you to act weirdly.

More-and-more I'm seeing in the New Testament that the norm is that a saved person is filled and ought to go on being filled day-by-day as a dynamic, renewable experience.

If that is not your norm, it should be; it can be; it needs to be. So today, if you get saved, God the Holy Spirit will come to indwell you, and you will be filled, and you will experience His power.

Today, if you are already saved, but have little or no power of the Holy Spirit, you can have a subsequent experience, by faith, that then becomes your new normal.

There is a lot more we could say, but the teaching that always emerges is that whatever we do, it is "not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord" (Zechariah 4:6).

Jdg 3:11 So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

We don't know anything about the forty-year career of Othniel. Did he win one decisive battle? Was it a campaign? The details are omitted so that we focus on God's Spirit, rather than on Othniel being spiritual, or strategic.

Do you need to be a hero, or a heroine? Ask, seek, and knock for the Holy Spirit, Whom Jesus promised would flow from our lives like a torrent of living water. Go on being filled.

Next, we see Ehud, whose heroics we might subtitle, "*Happy Entrails to You*"

(v12-30)

His manager warned Apollo Creed to not fight Rocky Balboa, because he was a southpaw. Later in his career, Rocky tried to confuse Clubber Lang by fighting him right-handed.

Lefties create problems, as King Eglon was about to find out.

Jdg 3:12 And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD strengthened Eglon king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD.

Jdg 3:13 Then he gathered to himself the people of Ammon and Amalek, went and defeated Israel, and took possession of the City of Palms.

Unlike Megamind, the Israelites were never good at being bad. You know who were good at being bad? The Canaanites, in this case the Moabites, Ammonites, and Amalekites.



They were already evil, so God wasn't the author of evil. They could have repented, and converted, at any time. In the mean time, God "strengthened" them in order to use them to discipline Israel.

Jdg 3:14 So the children of Israel served Eglon king of Moab eighteen years.

That was a decade longer than previously. More than twice as long. But don't blame God, or suggest His discipline was overly harsh, because we read next,

Jdg 3:15 But **when** the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for them...

As soon as they "cried out" to Him, the Lord acted on their behalf. It was their stubbornness to wait so long.

You've seen this in your kids. They simply will not bend their will. They'd rather stay timed-out than give in.

Jdg 3:15 But when the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for them: Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man...

The Bible mentions left-handed people on only three occasions:

1. Here, in the story of Ehad's assassination of the Moabite king.
2. Later in Judges it mentions 700 southpaws who could use the sling with deadly accuracy (Judges 20:16).
3. There are two-dozen ambidextrous warriors who came to support David in Hebron (First Chronicles 12:2).

All of these stories of left-handed people in the Bible appear in military contexts, and, curiously, all involve members of the tribe of Benjamin.

Benjamin, by the way, means *son of my right hand*. These guys were left-handed sons-of-my-right-hand.

If you happen to be left-handed, I don't need to tell you that the world is a tough place for you. Historically, left-handedness has been seen as an oddity, even a disability. People were encouraged to correct their left-handed children. Being left-handed was even seen by some as being a sign of evil.

Language seems to bear out this meaning. Something that is wicked or evil we call sinister, the Latin word for the left-hand.

Do you surf or snowboard? Boardsport riders are "footed" in one of two stances, generally called "regular" and "goofy." Guess which ones are the "goofy-footed?" The lefties.

More to our point, in Hebrew, being left-handed is described as *restricted in his right hand*. This can be understood in one of three ways:

1. Ehud was disabled.
2. Ehud was ambidextrous.
3. Ehud was left-handed.

He was probably a lefty who would be seen as disadvantaged because it was a right-handed world.

Jdg 3:15 But when the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for them: Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man. By him the children of Israel sent tribute to Eglon king of Moab.

Sounds like Ehud was the regular courier of Israel's tribute to King Eglon. King Eglon was familiar with him.

Jdg 3:16 Now Ehud made himself a dagger (it was double-edged and a cubit in length) and fastened it under his clothes on his right thigh.

I'm guessing that King Eglon's guards would conduct a pat-down of anyone who approached him on his throne. A right-handed warrior would wear his sword on his left thigh. It's easy to get sloppy working security, and in Ehud's case they would pat him down as they would a righty, and find no weapon on his left thigh.

Besides, if Ehud was the regular courier, they would even more have let down their guard.

Jdg 3:17 So he brought the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. (Now Eglon was a very fat man.)

"Fat" is considered a four-letter word. How would this get translated if there was a politically correct version of the Bible? Obese? Plus-sized? Horizontally challenged?

Jdg 3:18 And when he had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who had carried the tribute.

Jdg 3:19 But he himself turned back from the stone images that were at Gilgal, and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king." He said, "Keep silence!" And all who attended him went out from him.

Ehud left with the group, got as far as Gilgal, then returned. The "stone images" is most likely a reference to the memorial of twelve stones which Joshua's men had taken from the Jordan River (Joshua 4:1-7).

His return alone would further dissuade any thoughts of assault. If he was going to make a move, it makes more sense that it would have been earlier, with the strength of a group, not by himself.

His plan required he be alone with Eglon. Having a "secret message" for him would do the trick.

Jdg 3:20 So Ehud came to him (now he was sitting upstairs in his cool private chamber). Then Ehud said, "I have a message from God for you." So he arose from his seat.

Eglon was chillin'. The Moabite king was familiar with the God of Israel. He probably realized that God was strengthening him against the Jews. It would peak his curiosity to know God had a secret message for him.

Jdg 3:21 Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly.

Jdg 3:22 Even the hilt went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the dagger out of his belly; and his entrails came out.

At the end of *Godfather III*, Michael Corleone sends his old bodyguard to visit Don Lucchesi. He tells Lucchesi he has a secret message that he must whisper in his ear. He does, then grabs Lucchesi's own eyeglasses, stabs him in the jugular, assassinating him.

Jdg 3:23 Then Ehud went out through the porch and shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them.

Jdg 3:24 When he had gone out, Eglon's servants came to look, and to their surprise, the doors of the upper room were locked. So they said, "He is probably attending to his needs in the cool chamber."

Pardon the potty-talk, but his servants thought King Eglon was relieving himself on the toilet. They assumed he exchanged one throne for the other.

Jdg 3:25 So they waited till they were embarrassed, and still he had not opened the doors of the upper room. Therefore they took the key and opened them. And there was their master, fallen dead on the floor.

I'll share with you one of my most endearing childhood memories. Growing up, as a kid, if I spent too much time in the bathroom, one of my brothers would knock and ask, "Did you fall in?"

One thing you did not want to do was let yourself in to the fat king's chambers, and especially if he was doing his business. At some point, however, they simply could no longer wait.

Jdg 3:26 But Ehud had escaped while they delayed, and passed beyond the stone images and escaped to Seirah.

Jdg 3:27 And it happened, when he arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the mountains of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mountains; and he led them.

Jdg 3:28 Then he said to them, "Follow me, for the LORD has delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand." So they went down after him, seized the fords of the Jordan leading to Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross over.

Jdg 3:29 And at that time they killed about ten thousand men of Moab, all stout men of valor; not a man escaped.

Conquest was as easy as breathing when they turned to God.

Jdg 3:30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for eighty years.

We don't need to be told that Ehud had the Spirit come upon him. It's implied. What Ehud adds to our understanding of being God's hero is that the Lord prefers to work through our weaknesses, not our strengths.

Anyone hearing this story in ancient times would see Ehud as weak, as disadvantaged, as disabled. Even if he was skilled with his left hand, left-handedness was something frowned upon, to be pitied for.

God is glorified; He is magnified; when His strength is seen against the backdrop of our weakness.

A weak, but Spirit-filled believer is God's preferred hero. You and I certainly qualify. You don't need to be left-handed to be, spiritually speaking, goofy-footed.

Last, we see Shamgar, whose heroics we might subtitle, "*The One-Verse Wonder*"

(v31)

Speaking of Jack Black, in *Nacho Libre* the hero and his sidekick eat some delicious looking seasoned corn on the cob that is being sold on the streets in Mexico. Later they use it as a projectile weapon to great comic effect.

Improvised weapons are great fun in the movies; and it is the hallmark of our final hero.

Jdg 3:31 After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed six hundred men of the Philistines with an ox goad; and he also delivered Israel.

Shamgar and Anath are not Hebrew names. He was a convert to Judaism. God is no respecter of persons.

An ox goad is a stick about eight feet long with a sharpened iron point (First Samuel 3:21), used to train and drive oxen when plowing. Shamgar used the ox goad like a javelin or a spear.

We don't know if he was a farmer, familiar with ox goads; or a soldier who improvised weapons.

We don't know if he "killed six hundred" Philistines at one time, or over his career. Perhaps he was plowing with his oxen when the Philistines appeared over the hill. Bad day for them.

What we do know is that his weapon was adequate to his task.

We know that the Philistines had iron chariots. The only weapon specifically mentioned in Judges is the sword. Also mentioned are iron chariots. What about armor?

It's a little bit in the future, when the time of the judges was ending; but in First Samuel we have a very detailed description of Goliath's Philistine armor and weapons:

1Sa 17:5 He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail, and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of bronze.

1Sa 17:6 And he had bronze armor on his legs and a bronze javelin between his shoulders.

1Sa 17:7 Now the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his iron spearhead weighed six hundred shekels; and a shield-bearer went before him.

David would defeat him with a sling and a stone. His weapon was adequate to his task.

It's never more resources that you need in order to be a hero or a heroine. Matter of fact, resources tend to detract from your dependence upon the Spirit to work through your weaknesses.

In the first trio of judges emerges the biblical equipment of a hero: dependent on the Spirit; not dependent upon material resources; believing that God's divine strength is revealed in human weakness.

Every one of us, who is saved, qualifies for hero-duty. Go from here God's hero; God's heroine.



