

A HERO WILL RISE

The Book of Judges

Text

Judges 4:1-24

Topic

A pagan woman named Jael kills the Canaanite captain by driving a tent peg through his head with a hammer

Title

*"Bang, Bang, Jael's Savage Hammer
Came Down Upon His Head"*

Introduction

Rocky, Hoosiers, Rudy, Remember the Titans, and Braveheart all have in common that the hero or heroes are underdogs, facing overwhelming odds.

We love underdog stories... **As long as it's someone else, not us, facing overwhelming odds.**

If you're a Christian, you have underdog written all over you:

- Jesus said that since the world hated Him, it will likewise hate you.
- Jesus promised you that, out in the world, you would have tribulation.
- The world in which you are the underdog is ruled by the god of this world, Satan, who goes about like a roaring lion, seeking to devour you.

- He's not alone in his malevolent efforts, having at his disposal one-third of all the created angels who fell with him. They are arranged into military hierarchies and are dispatched on well-planned campaigns to rob, kill, and destroy.

The odds seem overwhelming - **but you're told that you need not be overcome.**

- In the same verse where Jesus promised you tribulation, He quickly added, "Be of good cheer, I have **overcome** the world" (John 16:33).
- In First John 2:14, the apostle states that *we* "have **overcome** the wicked one," referring to the devil.

If I'm being honest, I don't always feel like an overcomer. Spiritually... Physically... Emotionally... Life seems totally overwhelming. Especially when a trouble I'm experiencing seems to drag on.

It's during those times that we are supposed to find encouragement in the believers who have gone before us, recorded on the pages of the Bible. We see that they were underdogs against overwhelming odds who nevertheless overcame.

Some overcame quickly; others over a longer period of time. But all give testimony to God's faithfulness.

We have an against-all-odds story in chapter four of the Book of Judges. I pray it's retelling can encourage us.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 God Has Sent You Out To Overcome Against Overwhelming Odds, and #2 God Can See To It You Overcome Against Overwhelming Odds.

#1 God Has Sent You Out To Overcome Against Overwhelming Odds

(v1-9)

I should tell you that chapters four and five go together.

- Chapter four is a *narrative* that describes what happened.
- Chapter five is a *praise song* written to commemorate what happened.

What happened?

Jdg 4:1 When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD.

Ehud had been raised-up by God as Israel's hero against King Eglon and the Moabites. After Ehud killed Eglon, the people of God had rest from their enemies for eighty years, until Ehud died.

These heroes didn't physically keep Israel in check. Ehud didn't go around threatening to kill anyone who got out of line.

No, their lives exerted a spiritual influence that kept Israel in check. Don't underestimate the influence you have as a believer. In fact we know, from the Thessalonians epistles in the New Testament, that the church on earth, as a whole, exerts a holy influence on the world by restraining evil.

You might look around and think, "The church isn't doing such a good job; evil is rampant."

Evil *is* restrained. Things would be much worse without the church. They **will** be much worse. Read the Revelation and you'll see what conditions will be like *after* the church is removed in the rapture.

Jdg 4:2 So the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth Hagoyim.

Jdg 4:3 And the children of Israel cried out to the LORD; for Jabin had nine hundred chariots of iron, and for twenty years he had harshly oppressed the children of Israel.

"Sold them" means they were subjugated by, and paid tribute to, King Jabin.

They didn't everyday for twenty years cry out to the Lord; they waited twenty years, then cried out to the Lord.

Last week I used the example of a child who won't repent, but stays in 'time-out' until you simply can't leave him or her there anymore. Never underestimate the sinner's stubbornness.

Is there something you've been holding on to - some sin of anger or bitterness? It's holding you captive. Repent, and cry out to the Lord.

This is the second of eight references to the "nine hundred chariots of iron." They were the Death Star of that age; a moving war machine, manned by a heavily armored and equipped soldier, and accompanied by armored and armed infantry.

We won't be told until chapter five, but among God's people, "Not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel" (v8). They were unarmed against the most heavily armed force of the time.

Do you remember Tank Man? Also known as the Unknown Protester or Unknown Rebel, Tank Man is the nickname of an unidentified man who stood in front of a column of tanks on June 5, 1989, the morning after the Chinese military had suppressed the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 by force. As the lead tank maneuvered to pass by the man, he repeatedly shifted his position in order to obstruct the tank's attempted path around him. The incident was filmed and seen worldwide.

Who in Israel would stand before the iron chariots of Jabin?

Jdg 4:4 Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time.

Jdg 4:5 And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

Deborah was the only female judge; if, in fact, she was a judge. The verb form of the word "judging" tells us that she was engaged in legal judging. Israelites would come to her and present their cases, looking for her to decide between parties, or to give legal advice. This is different from the male judges, who did not hold court, listen to complaints, or make legal decisions.

All the male judges were military leaders; or, at least, they fought the enemy. Deborah did not go Joan of Arc, but stayed off the field of battle.

Deborah was not providing military deliverance under her palm tree. The Israelites sought her out to obtain justice.

Most commentators include her in the list of judges God raised-up. I have no problem calling her a judge; but she probably needs an asterisk next to her name.

The thing to note is that just when you think you've got God figured out, He goes in a different direction. After reading about three heroes God raised-up, you're thinking He's gonna do exactly the same thing again... *And then He doesn't.*

Nobody puts Jehovah in a corner.

Jdg 4:6 Then she sent and called for Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, "Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded, 'Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun;

Jdg 4:7 and against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hand'?"

The wording makes it sound like Barak knew what he was supposed to do, but was disobeying. The original language doesn't indicate that at all. It reads like what it is - a prophecy, giving Barak his orders.

God spoke to Deborah, and she sent for Barak, to give him the prophecy.

I'm not going to get into the male, female roles discussion that sometimes surrounds this story. I'm not saying roles are unimportant. They are. I'm saying that this passage isn't here to teach us the proper submission of women, or the need for courageous men of God to step-up.

There are plenty of New Testament passages that were written for those express purposes.

This is a history of how God used two remarkable people in an outside-the-box way in order to deliver His people.

Regarding the roles of men and women, we *must* stay within biblical boundaries, but remain flexible while within them to allow God to work.

Technically, neither Deborah nor Barak was a judge the way the other eleven guys in this book were. Yet God used them as a team to deliver the Israelites.

Jdg 4:8 And Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!"

Barak had been given, through the prophecy of a known prophetess, the exact battle plan, as well as the absolute assurance of victory. Still, he hesitated, and added a condition.

Why? I don't know, but I say, "Thank you." Even with the clear Word of God, Barak hesitated, but God was patient with him. I'm grateful, because I, too, hesitate to believe God, even though I have the completed Word of God.

I'm not excusing unbelief or disobedience; I'm just recognizing that God puts up with us, and uses us in spite of it.

Jdg 4:9 So she said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh.

To her credit, Deborah was flexible. She could have refused, and left them in a stalemate.

Although it's clear Barak was wrong to ask her to accompany him, why not go along? Her prophecy was solid, so she was in no danger.

Deborah utters another prophecy, "for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." It isn't her; it's Jael, as we will see momentarily.

That's the set-up for the battle. Ten thousand unarmed men against nine hundred iron chariots and a multitude of heavily armed and armored infantry. The strategy God had suggested was for the Israelites to reveal themselves, unarmed, on the field of battle, then wait for Sisera's soldiers to annihilate them.

Literally, their strategy was to take a stand against overwhelming odds, and trust that the Lord would intervene.

Sound familiar?

Eph 6:13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to **withstand** in the evil day, and having done all, to **stand**.

Against an army described by the apostle Paul as "principalities... powers... the rulers of the darkness of this age... [and] spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12), we are to believe that truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, prayer, and God's Word will **always** give us victory.

God sends us out against overwhelming odds. Get used to it. If you feel overwhelmed, it's because you are - apart from Him.

Oswald Chambers wrote,

God does not give us overcoming life: He gives us life as we overcome. The strain is the strength. If there is no strain, there is no strength. Are you asking God to give you life and liberty and joy? He cannot, unless you will accept the strain. Immediately you face the strain, you will get the strength... If you spend yourself out physically, you become exhausted; but spend yourself spiritually, and you get more strength. God never gives strength for to-morrow, or for the next hour, but only for the strain of the minute.

If you feel you are on a battlefield facing overwhelming odds, you are right where you need to be to see truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, prayer, and God's Word prevail.

#2 God Can See To It You Overcome Against Overwhelming Odds

(v10-24)

One of the great lines in the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy was uttered by Gimli, the dwarf.

To clear the way for Frodo and Sam to reach Mount Doom, Aragorn suggested that the forces of the West march headfirst to the Black Gate of Mordor, to serve as a diversion.

Gimli gave it a moments thought, then said, "Certainty of death; small chance of success; what are we waiting for?"

The ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun must have had that dwarf courage. It's almost the perfect quote to utter after hearing the Lord's seemingly crazy suicide plan. They'd probably change it to "**no** chance of success."

Jdg 4:11 Now Heber the Kenite, of the children of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, had separated himself from the Kenites and pitched his tent near the terebinth tree at Zaanaim, which is beside Kedesh.

Jdg 4:12 And they reported to Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor.

A renegade Kenite, Heber had allied himself against Israel and with King Jabin. He acted as surveillance for Sisera, and provided him with intel that Barak was mustering men for battle.

He didn't know it, but Heber was part of God's plan. After all, this was not going to be a sneak attack. In order for the plan to work, someone must tell Sisera.

Jdg 4:13 So Sisera gathered together all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people who were with him, from Harosheth Hagoyim to the River Kishon.

Ten thousand Israelites seems like a big number. Wouldn't fewer guys getting the victory bring God greater glory?

That's not the way to look at this one. On the surface, this was a suicide mission. No one would give odds for them to live through the day. Finding that many guys for what, on paper, was a martyr-mission says a lot about their trust in God.

Jdg 4:14 Then Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the LORD gone out before you?" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him.

Since this was God's strategy, and since Deborah spoke for God, it seems natural she'd give the go-ahead.

Notice the absolute stupidity of this. On the hillside, you might have some chance against iron chariots. In the valley, where they advanced, you were road kill.

Jdg 4:15 And the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot.

The author tells us what the Lord did before we learn how He did it. He wants to emphasize it was the Lord, and no one else, who "routed Sisera."

So, how did He do it? Chapter five tells this tale in song. There we'll read,

Jdg 5:19 "The kings came and fought, Then the kings of Canaan fought In Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo; They took no spoils of silver.

Jdg 5:20 They fought from the heavens; The stars from their courses fought against Sisera.

Jdg 5:21 The torrent of Kishon swept them away, That ancient torrent, the torrent of Kishon. O my soul, march on in strength!

God sent a freak storm. It rendered some of the chariots unusable, stuck in mud and mire. Others were washed away, and the soldiers drowned. The Canaanite infantry became disoriented and fled.

Jdg 4:16 But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth Hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left.

Some of the chariots must have been able to retreat. What a sight - Israelites running on foot, chasing iron chariots.

The Canaanites probably understood that they had walked into a trap set by the God of Israel. They were a superstitious lot, and familiar with the stories of Jehovah's deeds. The timing of the storm was not coincidental. They fled from God, but to no avail.

Jdg 4:17 However, Sisera had fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; for there was peace between Jabin king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.

Sisera went to the camp of his loyal intelligence officer, seeking a hiding place. He expected that Jael, Heber's wife, would be sympathetic.

Jdg 4:18 And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, "Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; do not fear." And when he had turned aside with her into the tent, she covered him with a blanket.

Jdg 4:19 Then he said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty." So she opened a jug of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him.

The "blanket" was probably a large rug on the floor of the tent. He got under it, as a hiding place.

She gives him some heavy cream, which commentators claim acted like the old version of NyQuil. I think she was just going overboard on the hospitality, to disarm him.

Jdg 4:20 And he said to her, "Stand at the door of the tent, and if any man comes and inquires of you, and says, 'Is there any man here?' you shall say, 'No.' "

You've heard of the Bridge of Spies? This was the tent of spies - only Jael was going to prove to be a double agent.

Jdg 4:21 Then Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went down into the ground; for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.

Women were tasked with setting up and tearing down tents, so Jael would be pretty adept with a mallet and tent pegs.

Heber had helped Sisera; now his wife killed him. Was there disharmony in this home?

I'm going to go out on a short limb here and suggest that Jael might have been trying to help her husband. I think we have to assume she knew that Heber had been the one to warn Sisera of Barak's advance against him.

She had also heard, by now, of the route of Sisera by Barak. She deduced that Barak was in pursuit of Sisera, and that Barak would prevail, since the God of Israel was obviously involved.

The only way to save her husband was to dispatch of Sisera herself - to take sides, as it were, with Barak.

If I was Heber, I'd be thankful; but I think I'd sleep with one eye open, and I'd hide the hammers.

The author of Judges, who we say is Samuel, makes no moral judgment on Jael's actions. In chapter five, she is praised for them. She did what she needed to do in a time of war to protect her family.

Jdg 4:22 And then, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said to him, "Come, I will show you the man whom you seek." And when he went into her tent, there lay Sisera, dead with the peg in his temple.

Deborah predicted that this would happen, so any thoughts Barak might have had about going after Heber were put in check. It all seemed to be in the will of God.

We might pause and say a few words about God's providence. In theology, providence is His *providing* for His plans, to see to it His will is accomplished. But God does it without violating our free will.

In this case, God was providing by sending Barak into battle. He would have gotten the glory by finishing-off Sisera. When Barak balked, God provided someone else - Jael. God's providence saw to it His will was accomplished, but without violating free will.

Jdg 4:23 So on that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan in the presence of the children of Israel.

Jdg 4:24 And the hand of the children of Israel grew stronger and stronger against Jabin king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

In chapter five we'll read that they had rest for forty years. It was a rest won over time by Israel increasing in strength against King Jabin.

Victory is a process. We have it, but we must walk in it, taking more-and-more ground all the time.

This is how overcoming works. You take your stand, then wait for the Lord to act. Now in the Bible, it always seems as though God acts more quickly, and more supernaturally, than He does in your life. Your troubles seem to go on, and on, and on. You keep waiting for God to send the storm that will sweep away your enemies, but it doesn't come.

While it's true in the case of Barak that God acted rather quickly, their waiting must have been somewhat terrifying. Imagine standing your ground, unarmed, as nine hundred war machines shook the ground you were standing upon, headed toward you to slaughter you. I'd bet that God didn't send the storm until the last possible instant.

There are stories in the Bible of much longer times of overcoming. David, for example, was chased by a murderous King Saul at least eight years, maybe as many as thirteen.

Stand and see the victory the Lord will bring. If you're struggling while standing, truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, prayer, and God's Word are the supernatural resources that are available to you.

They are more powerful than any storm.