

## Lessons from the Book of Judges

### Lesson 3: Chapter 4- Deborah

#### Verses 1-3

v 1

- Recall that after the days of Ehud, who delivered Israel from the Moabite threat, there was peace in the land for around 80 years.
- As will often be the case in this book, that period of peace failed to be treasured as a blessing from God following their deliverance:
  - Israel failed to appreciate and be thankful for the One whose power was sustaining that peace, and instead of using that time to their greatest advantage and growing closer to God, and teaching their children about why they were enjoying such prosperity in the Land, they used it to grow a divide between them and the Lord
    - It makes me want to examine how wisely I'm using the times of peace God blesses me with!
  - After Ehud, who held up the spiritual light in Israel, died, the people sought after idols and neglected the Lord

v 2

- This of course had a consequence: God cannot tolerate sin, and his hand was forced to do something that He took absolutely no pleasure in: "*selling them into the hands*" of their enemies:
  - They continued to fulfill the words of Moses who said: "Behold while I am yet alive and with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the Lord, and how much more after my Death?"
  - Well it had been quite some time since Moses spoke those words, and over 100 years since the death of his successor Joshua: but they do indeed seem to grow continuously more wicked as time goes by
- The enemy that God handed them over to is worth special consideration:
  - The name Jabin, much like Pharaoh, or Abimelech, or Behn-Hadad, was a name that whoever held the throne took on.
  - Jabin was the title of one of the northern tribes of Canaan, their capital city being Hazor in the territory of Naphtali

- 150 years earlier in the time of Joshua, recorded in Joshua 11, another Jabin was at the head of a group of Kings and a very large army that stood in their way of taking the northern portion of the promised land:
- In one of Joshua's greatest battles, they routed a massive army of horses and Chariots and destroyed the city of Hazor:
- We point these facts out because their previous oppressors had all come from outside the land:
  - There was no military threat inside of Israel, all the kings and nations had been destroyed or reduced to nothing: and yet Israel had allowed this nation to not only rebuild, but they had done so to the point that now this people is powerful enough to oppress them:

v 3

- At the head of Jabin's army was the commander Sisera:
- Sisera was in command of 900 chariots of Iron, and would severely afflict the Israelites for a period of 20 years!
  - This is humiliating for God's people: not only are they being oppressed for a time longer than their 3 previous enemies, but as mentioned, it is not a people that they had been masters over:

### **Verses 4-7**

v 4

- The oppression of the Canannites doesn't appear to have spread further south than Naphtali and Zebulun, as the administration to the south is still functioning
- It is at this point that we are introduced to Deborah, who is interesting for at least two reasons:
  - First, she is a female Judge, which if you are reading this for this first time is not what you are expecting:
  - Second, she is not raised up in response to the people crying out for deliverance:
    - She is already on the scene acting as a judge, and appear to have risen to this position not by military exploits or through a hereditary position, but simply

by being determined to be a Godly example in the midst of an oft straying people

v 5

- She held a court of sorts in a fairly central location at Ramah and Bethel, a very similar situation to what Samuel would establish in his own circuit later on when he acted as Judge
- She was trusted and respected enough that the men of Israel sought her out for judgment

v 6

- Acting on instruction from God, Deborah appoints Barak, a man of Naphtali whose name means “lighting” to deliver Israel from Jabin and Sisera
  - His orders were to gather 10,000 men from the two tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun, and gather them at Mt. Tabor, located in the valley of Jezreel
  - Although we learn from the song of Deborah in Ch. 5 that there were others who came to help, it seems that God is saying that the tribes who had chiefly fallen away, were the ones who would do the heavy lifting:
    - There is a point to be made that God will supply people to help us out, but He expects us to work hard to clean up our own messes:

v 7

- At any rate, God said that He would bring the bulk of Jabin’s forces, including all 900 chariots there for Barak to confront with the armies of Israel
  - This would have been a daunting piece of news to say the least, and we see that reflected in Barak’s response: but the fact that God would draw them there lets us know who was in control

### **Verses 8-11**

v 8

- Barak’s response is one that demonstrates a lack of faith in God to provide and deliver:
  - There are others, (like Gideon) that when called to fulfill duty for the Lord show hesitancy or place conditions on it, and yet they are shown patience:

- The fact that in the following verse Deborah is fairly harsh with Barak leads me to assume that she expected better of him, that he should have been in a position of ready acceptance instead of saying he was only brave enough to go if Deborah would hold his hand!

v 9

- Deborah says that she will go with him, but the journey will not end with Barak finding honor in the eyes of the people:
  - Instead It will be given to an as of yet unnamed woman:
  - Worth noting out that God is already promising a complete victory at this point that ends with the death or capture of Jabin's chief military leader

v 10-11

- Barak accepts this fate and is willing to lead these forces, which he calls together at Kedesh, this particular city being located in Naphtali:
  - The text then gives us an important foot note in the story:
  - The Kenites, relatives of Moses who had been allowed to stay in the promised land with the people, had settled SW of the dead sea in Judah's territory
    - But this particular Kenite had broken away from tribe and family and had moved away:
    - It becomes obvious later in the chapter that he has not just moved away in distance, but in practice as well:
      - The Kenites, (ancestors of those faithful Rechabites) seem to have been a fairly faithful people on a consistent basis, and Heber apparently is falling in line with the Canaanites: something reflected in his separating himself about as far as he could from family and still be in Canaan
  - But this is important for the story, because Heber has relocated to the home city of Barak, and will provide an important role in our story:

## **Verses 12-16**

v 12-16 (More general overview)

- As God had promised, the gathering of Barak's forces at Mt. Tabor lured Sisera there with all 900 chariots, and all of his army as well
  - While it may have seemed overwhelming to Barak, what God is doing is setting up an opportunity for them to completely destroy this enemy for good, and completely remove this threat that has hurt them so much for the past 20 years
- Thankfully, this time around there is no argument from Barak: When Deborah says to advance he leads the men down in a complete rout as the Lord defeats their enemies:
  - Chapter 5:4-5 indicates that once God lured the army there, He brought a great downpour that rendered their chariots ineffectual as well as great thunder and quaking to confuse and frighten the enemy:
    - This is born out that Sisera's chariot is abandoned to flee on foot
  - The victory was so complete, that there was not one soldier left alive-- except one: the captain that God had promised would meet his fate at the hands of a woman:

## **Verses 17-22**

- At this point the house of Heber comes back into the story; and we see that Heber was living the sort of life that wicked kings of wicked nations could live peaceably with him, and consider him a friend as well!
- Sisera, thinking that this is a safe place, turns aside to seek refuge and relief, asking for a drink and for Jael to act as a look out for Sisera:
  - Jael, obviously has her plan in place: she gives him milk to drink and tucks him in: she wants him to feel safe and snug:
  - In one of the more gruesome fates, Jael waits until he is asleep and drives the tent peg through his temple: where he will stay until he is presented to Barak:

## **Verses 23-24**

- And so, with the act of a very courageous woman, God brings victory to Israel:
- He would continue to be with them until Jabin and the rest of those Canaanites were destroyed and removed as a threat:

## **Taking it With us:**

So what are some lessons that we can draw out from this amazing story and apply through out the week? I'm sure you've thought of many more than I, but here are at least four things I can think of we can put into practice right now:

### **1.) It doesn't have to be you!**

- Deborah is impressive to me for a few different reasons, but I think the largest is her attitude: She wasn't seeking glory for herself:
- I think if I had been Deborah, I might have been tempted to chafe at having God choose Barak over me to deliver the people:
  - She had been working hard all of this time to lead the people and be a good example, and now God is going to choose someone else to lead the people: even worse, someone from one of the tribes that apparently started this whole mess??
- Even Barak, after his rebuke accepts God's decision with good graces: Imagine being told that you had to do a job, but would get no pay or receive no credit: You might say no deal!
  - But Barak still leads the armies of God knowing that the greatest glory will be given to someone else:
- We obviously want to encourage people to be active workers in God's kingdom: but we want to foster the attitude that it doesn't have to be us in the spotlight, it doesn't have to be us getting the credit or pats on the back:
  - If every Christian had this attitude, it would stop a lot of bitterness and jealousy right in their tracks!

### **2. God sometimes expects us to do more than we think we are able of doing:**

- So you sometimes feel like God expects more of you than you think you can do?
- Well, you are exactly right! God does expect you to do more than you think you can: a lot more!
  - Back in 4:7, can you imagine taking this as a good thing? It was an overwhelming task!
  - But we, just like Barak, look at these tasks and think, there's just no way I can do this!

- But what God expects us to remember when we are confronted with some pretty big tasks, or daunting trials, is that He has drawn them into the valley for us to conquer, not to be defeated by: which leads us to our third point:

### **3.) We need to see events as God sees them**

- In 4:14: If you were listening to a sports commentator call the battle, that's not what you'd expect to hear:
- The small, ill equipped forces of Israel, confronted by these 900 chariots and a great host of an army, and Deborah says: get up, the battle is already won!
  - If we could walk into those difficult situations in our lives, the ones drawn into the valley, with this attitude that the battle is already won: it will do wonders for our perspective:

### **4.) We can serve despite the choices of others:**

- We talked about worthy women this morning: Jael is a worthy woman
- By all textual evidence, she was married to someone who made friends with the enemies of God
  - Heber had forsaken his family and moved clear across the nation, brokering peace with wicked men who oppressed his brethren
  - And yet despite the poor leadership of her husband, she still made the choice to follow God
    - We, like Jael, might not always be surrounded by people who want to do what is right, at work, school, church, or in our homes:
    - But the actions of others don't dictate our faithfulness to the Lord: