

JUDGES

CHAPTER 4&5

Deborah, Barak, and Jael

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED:

As Children of God, obedience to God always leads to our good, while disobedience degrades our quality of life and brings us into bondage.

The scriptures tell us: *Deuteronomy 6:6-8* *6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

INTRODUCTION: After Joshua led the Children of Israel into the Promise Land, he continued to be leader of the Nation until his death, however, Joshua did not name a successor. Israel had no formal governmental structure. For over four-hundred years they were governed by various “Judges” that rose to leadership in response to particular problems.

Israel developed a destructive pattern; when they were blessed by God they became complacent and adopted the evil practices of the other people who inhabited the Land. God would discipline Israel by allowing other Nations to take away their freedom and dominate them. After a time, the people would repent and God would raise up a deliverer (a Judge) who would lead the people to victory over the enemy. The Judge would continue to lead the Nation, but inevitably after the Judge’s death, the people would rebel against the Lord and return to their sinful practices. This cycle continued throughout the four hundred years.

This is a summary of the cycle:

Devotion: Joshua’s generation loved and followed God.

Blessing: God showered blessing on Israel

Prosperity: There was peace and prosperity in the land

Apathy: After a time, spiritual apathy and an easy life led the people to not pursue God.

Decadence: This led to idolatry

Judgement: God allowed Israel’s enemies to oppress them.

Repentance: The people finally cried out to God to remove the oppression.

Deliverance: God sent a deliverer to remove the oppression.

Then the cycle began all over again.

Deborah was the fourth Judge over the Nation of Israel. She was a prophetess who God called to bring the people back to obedience and free them from tyranny of Jabin, King of Canaan.

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Judges 4

4 And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD after Ehud died. 5 And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. 6 Then the people of Israel cried out to the LORD for help, for he had 900 chariots of iron and he oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for twenty years.

7 Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. 8 She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment. 9 She sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali and said to him, “Has not the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you, ‘Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun. 10 And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin’s army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand?’” 11 Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go.” 12 And she said, “I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.” 13 Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. 14 And Barak called out Zebulun and Naphtali (two of Israel’s twelve tribes) to Kedesh. And 10,000 men went up at his heels, and Deborah went up with him.

15 Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the Kenites, the descendants of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaanannim, which is near Kedesh.

16 When Sisera was told that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, 17 Sisera called out all his chariots, 900 chariots of iron, and all the men who were with him, from Harosheth-hagoyim to the river Kishon. 18 And Deborah said to Barak, “Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the LORD go out before you?” So, Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him. 19 And the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword. And Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot. 20 And Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left.

21 But Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. 22 And Jael came out to meet Sisera and said to him, “Turn aside, my lord; turn aside to me; do not be afraid.” So, he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. 23 And he said to her, “Please

give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.” So, she opened a skin of milk and gave him a drink and covered him. ²⁰ *And he said to her, “Stand at the opening of the tent, and if any man comes and asks you, ‘Is anyone here?’ say, ‘No.’”* ²¹ *But Jael the wife of Heber took a tent peg, and took a hammer in her hand. Then she went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple until it went down into the ground while he was lying fast asleep from weariness. So, he died.* ²² *And behold, as Barak was pursuing Sisera, Jael went out to meet him and said to him, “Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.” So, he went into her tent, and there lay Sisera dead, with the tent peg in his temple.*

²³ *So on that day God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan before the people of Israel.* ²⁴ *And the hand of the people of Israel pressed harder and harder against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.*

Application:

God usually chooses men to lead His people. Perhaps no godly men stepped up to assume leadership. Deborah, a godly “prophetess” was chosen by God to lead the Nation’s deliverance. Deborah was unique in that she was a prophetess and the only woman Judge.

In Judges Chapter 5, Deborah and Barak wrote a song, which adds further detail of all that happened in this story. Deborah tells of deserted highways and traveler’s finding round-about ways to get places. As a mother, she declares that it was not safe to walk the roads and not safe for her children. She says of herself, “Until I, Deborah, arose, a mother in Israel.” (chapter 5:6)

We also are living in a time where godly women often have to take the lead because there is no godly man who will take charge. It is not an indictment against men, but it is just a sad truth. There are many homes where only the mom speaks and lives for God. Fortunately, God uses people who are willing and available. Deborah was a powerful leader whom God used in great ways. We see that her leadership was critical during a time when Israel was in bondage to the Canaanites.

Deborah summoned Barak, revealed God’s plan and declared to him that God would give Sisera into *his* (Barak’s) hand. Since Deborah was a prophetess, she was God’s mouthpiece of truth. Immediately Barak told Deborah that he would not go unless she went with him. From a worldly perspective, the situation facing Deborah and Barak was hopeless, but with God, all things are possible. If God has declared it, you can take it to the bank that **it would happen!** This account tells us that Sisera’s army was incredibly strong as he had 900 iron chariots. Israel had been oppressed for nearly 20 years and had been beaten down and was no match for Jabin’s army. Israel did not even have spears or shields.

God defeated Sisera’s army. There was a torrential rain and flood. It was not the time of year the water should be flowing, but God caused the chariots to be stuck in the mud and were of no use. Every man in the army was killed and Sisera fled on foot.

Psalm 20:7 Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.

Psalm 33:16-19 *The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. 17. The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might, it cannot rescue. 18 Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him, on those who hope in his steadfast love. 19. that he may deliver their soul from death....*

Why was the cycle of sin not broken in the day of the judges?

Israel had not obeyed God. When God commanded them to completely drive out the Canaanites they disobeyed. God loves His people and He knew the Canaanites and their false gods would corrupt the hearts and minds of the People. We too, rationalize God's commands. We are often governed by human intellect rather than God's Word. We sometimes think, "The things God requires of us do not seem to be in our best interest. We can figure out a better plan." The children of Israel did not completely obey the Lord. They only partially obeyed. Why? Because it did not make sense to them.

The next generation after Joshua did not know the Lord. It is tragic that parents failed to communicate to their children the power and the work of God. The same is true in today's culture. **Our children will not know about God's power if we do not share it with them.** We live in such an affluent society. There are powerful forces that are vying for the hearts of our children.

Conclusion

There are so many other things we can learn from this powerful account from Judges 4-5. I challenge you to read and meditate on Chapter 5 of Judges.

If there is a cycle of sin in our lives, deciding to follow God and obeying Him will bring life to us.

Consider This last scripture

Deuteronomy 30: 15-20

¹⁵ "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶ If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God^a that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules,^b then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, ²⁰ loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."