

EXPOSITION OF JUDGES

Message #5

Judges 4:1-24

I heard of a story in which two bank robbers walked into a bank to rob it and one of the bank robbers said- “Everyone put your hands up and nobody move.” His partner started to move to get the money and the other partner saw the movement and shot his partner. How crazy is that?

It is about as crazy as God’s people. I read an interesting statement a while back that said, “It is amazing how many young fools survive to become old fools.” God’s people would get themselves into miserable situations by their own choices. They would find themselves enslaved to all kinds of things simply because they would not turn to God. But then finally they would turn to God and God would come to their rescue. Then just as soon as they were rescued, they would turn right back around and do exactly the same thing again.

That is the point you see over and over again in Judges:

WHEN GOD’S PEOPLE HAVE MADE SINFUL AND STUPID CHOICES THAT HAVE PUT THEM IN MISERY, GOD WILL GRACIOUSLY HELP HIS PEOPLE AND TURN THINGS AROUND IF THEY WILL TURN TO HIM AND ASK HIM FOR HELP.

This is the whole story of the book of Judges and it is certainly the story we see in **Judges 4**. The cycle continues as we come to **Judges 4**. God will have to give Israel another thrashing and then Israel will finally turn back to God again and God will deliver her. What is one of the most mind-boggling realities found in this book of Judges is that **God will not ever give up on His people no matter how sinful or stupid they are.**

HISTORICAL FACT #1 – Israel did evil and life became miserable and intimidating. **4:1-3**

After Ehud died, Israel reverted back to doing evil once again. Can you believe that? She had enjoyed God’s peace and tranquility and blessings for eighty years (Judges 3:30) and you would think that is what she would always want. You would certainly think that Israel would have learned her lesson by now. They should have learned that we are the happiest, the healthiest, and the holiest when we are obedient to God. She knew that every time she fell into sin she ended up in miserable circumstances; you would think she wouldn’t ever want to do that again. Most people should have said, “You know every time we move away from God and start getting mixed up with things that aren’t right, we end up in a big disaster.” But that is not what happened. **Verse 1 says, “Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD.”**

After Ehud died and Israel fell into sin, God decided to let a Canaanite king named Jabin, aided by his brilliant military commander Sisera, sweep into northern Israel and take her captive. God said okay, you don’t want to obey Me, then I’ll let things dominate you that should never dominate you. **One of the greatest lies of Satan is that sin is liberating. The truth is sin is enslaving (John 8:34). Sin will never make God’s people happy; it will leave them hurting and degraded.**

Now according to **verse 2** there was a Canaanite king whose name was Jabin (a Canaanite king's name like Caesar) who reigned in Hazor, which is located about nine miles north of the Sea of Galilee. What is so ironic about this is that Hazor was the very place Joshua had previously conquered for Israel and now God would use them to dominate Israel (Joshua 11:1, 10-11). God decides to punish His people by using the very place and people who had at one time been controlled by Israel.

I have a pastor friend who had a good man in his church who started to drift away from the things of God. He had been saved out of a worldly background, and he had grown in the Lord and became a leader in the church. But he started drifting away from his focus on God and God's Word. One night my pastor friend received a call from his wife and she said he has gone back to a bar. My pastor friend got in his car, drove to the bar, went in, and walked right up to that man and said, "What are you doing here?" The man started crying and he left. The irony is that the very place from which God had delivered him was now the same place being used to convict him. That was Jabin and Hazor.

Now the real emphasis here is on Sisera. Sisera becomes the real Canaanite antagonist and Jabin will kind of blend into the background. According to **verse 2**, Sisera's military headquarters was located at Harosheth-hagoyim, which means "Harosheth of the Gentiles or nations." This city sat at the foot of Mount Carmel about thirty miles southwest of Hazor and was located on the plain of Esdraelon known as the valley of Meggido. This was an excellent piece of land. It had good farm ground and plenty of water.

According to **verse 3**, Sisera had 900 iron chariots at his disposal and a very large military, and he oppressed Israel for twenty years. This represented the latest in military technology. Israel was no match for this intimidating enemy. As Gary Inrig said, "Israel was outmanned, outgunned and out positioned" (*Hearts of Iron, Feet of Clay*, p. 58).

Now here is the thing we need to remember - God had sovereignly provided this intimidating adversary against His own people so that His people would turn to Him and experience His delivering power. The real problem for Israel was not a military problem; it was a spiritual problem. If Israel would just turn to God, God could and would deliver her from seemingly impossible odds.

I am convinced that God is sovereign over everything in our life. When He permits some hostile thing to raise its ugly head against us, He has His purpose for it. It is possible that we have actually done something that has actually caused God to put us in a scary and humiliating situation. If we will turn to Him, we will see great things.

HISTORICAL FACT #2 – Israel cries to God and God raises up deliverers. **4:3-9**

God calls both men and women into His family, and God can use both men and women to get a job done for Him. He can use a woman and He can use a man to direct people into a right relationship with Him.

In this instance **He uses two women, Deborah and Jael, and a man, Barak.** (By the way this Barak, unlike others with the same name, is pro-Israeli and pro-Israel getting her land.)

Deliverer #1 - God sovereignly uses Deborah . **4:4-7**

There are five key observations we want to make about Deborah.

(Observation #1) - We know nothing about Deborah's background.

We don't know much about Deborah. We know nothing about her family, ancestry, or tribe. Ladies, you don't have to come from a wonderful pedigree to be greatly used by God.

(Observation #2) - We do know Deborah was married . **4:4**

She had a husband whose name was Lappidoth (**verse 4**), but we don't know anything about him either. The word "Lappidoth" means lamps, so it is possible that her husband had a job of making lamps. It does appear that Deborah may have been a mother (Judges 5:7).

(Observation #3) - We know that Deborah was a prophetess . **4:4**

Women prophetesses were very rare. A prophetess did receive direct revelation from God and she did have the responsibility to communicate that revelation to Israel. A prophet received revelatory data from God pertaining to the future and revelatory data pertaining to the present .

In the O.T. there are only three women who are said to have had the gift of prophethood:

1) Miriam, Moses' sister (Exodus 15:20); 2) Huldah during the days of Josiah (II Kings 22:14-20); 3) Deborah. In the N.T. there is Anna who saw the baby Jesus at the Temple (Luke 2:36), and there were the four virgin daughters of Philip (Acts 21:8-9).

The gift of prophecy has now ceased in the Church Age (I Corinthians 13:8); however during the Tribulation, when the program of God swings back to Israel, the gift will become operative again (Joel 2:28-29). Deborah was one who did receive direct revelation from God for Israel.

(Observation #4) - We know that Deborah was a judge . **4:4-5**

Being a woman prophetess was rare and being a woman judge was even rarer . In fact, as Gary Inrig observed, "There was never another time in the nation of Israel's history when God chose a woman to be their leader. ... Deborah was chosen by God, called by God, raised up by God, and empowered by God. She was God's leader. Deborah was ... the only woman ever called by God to be the national leader of His people" (*Ibid.* p. 60).

It is more than just interesting that it is first brought out that she was a prophetess and second she was a judge. The reason why I think this is critical is because it is knowledge of the Word of God that puts a person in a position to make proper judgments .

According to **Judges 4:5**, she used to sit under a palm tree in the hill country of Ephraim and people would go out to present their cases to her and she would give her judgments and pronounce justices. God had given her a very special gift and she became quite a well-known political and judicial figure.

(Observation #5) - Deborah received specific revelation from God to deliver Israel. **4:6-7**

Deborah received direct revelation from God to send word to Barak, because he would be the one God would use to fight this battle. Since Barak was from Kedesh and since Deborah was from the Ramah/Bethel area, Barak had to travel about seventy miles just to have this meeting.

At the meeting Barak was informed that he was to go on a military march with 10,000 men to fight Sisera and his troops and his chariots, and God would give him victory. Now Barak was the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali. In other words, he lived at Kedesh of Naphtali. He was apparently known to be a warrior and obviously a good, respected military leader, and it most certainly had been revealed to Deborah by God that he was the one who should run this campaign.

Deborah was a humble and honest woman. She realized she had her role to play, but she also knew her limitations. G. Campbell Morgan said, “Deborah without Barak would have kindled enthusiasm, but would have accomplished nothing” (*Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, pp. 125-26).

Barak was to take his men to Mount Tabor, which is a cone-shaped mountain that rises to about 2,000 feet which is about 700 feet higher than the Jezreel Valley. The Kishon river was located about ten miles west of Mount Tabor.

Deliverer #2 - God sovereignly uses Barak. **4:8-16**

There are several observations we want to make here about Barak.

(Observation #1) - Barak wants Deborah to go with him. **4:8**

Barak was not in any way overwhelmed by the military challenge, but he did request that Deborah go with him. Deborah had just told Barak that she received a message from God that he was to go fight Jabin’s army. Barak must have had quite a bit of confidence in Deborah, but he wanted to make certain this was in fact a message from God and not the sentimental delusions of a religious and emotional woman. So he said, “I’ll go do it if you go with me.” He wanted the one who said she knew God’s Word right by his side and it didn’t matter to him if she was a woman.

(Observation #2) - Barak did not care if he got credit for this victory. **4:9**

Deborah agreed to go but she said the honor for the victory would not go to him but to her. But Barak was no egotist and he didn’t care. He wanted the one who knew God’s Word right by his side.

I agree with those commentators who view this as Barak wanting the Word of God and the presence of God. He was not interested in the limelight; he wanted to make certain that he precisely followed God's Word. In fact, that is what gets him in the list of faith heroes in Hebrews 11:32. Barak was not trusting in his military skill but in God's Word. **The biggest need we have in our war with this world is knowledge of God's Word.** Some women would have probably said, "I am not going to fight this battle with you." But not Deborah.

(Observation #3) - Barak and Deborah lead the men to Mount Tabor to fight Sisera. **4:10**

Barak and Deborah traveled seventy miles back to Kedesh and rounded up 10,000 troops. He got men from Naphtali, Zebulun (**4:6, 10**), Benjamin, Ephraim, Machir, and Issachar (5:14, 15). He moved toward Mount Tabor which was located about twelve miles west and south of Kedesh and six miles southeast of Nazareth. One commentator said when you get on top of this mountain, it offers "the finest view anywhere to be obtained in the whole compass of Palestine" (George Bush, *Critical and Practical Notes on the Book of Judges*, p. 47).

HISTORICAL FACT #3 – The enemy is alerted, impressive, and intimidating. **4:11-13**

When Barak and Deborah go to the top of the mountain, they see an intimidating enemy. A weasel traitor whose name was Heber, a Kenite, is introduced to us here. He was related to Israel through Moses (Judges 1:16), and the Kenites had a wonderful relationship with Israel. Heber was a spy who worked for Sisera. He went and told Sisera that Barak had gone to Mount Tabor and had come to fight him.

What is absolutely intriguing about all of this is that every bit of this is controlled by a sovereign God for the purpose of delivering His people. This Judas-type traitor had a major role to play in the sovereign plan of God. His evil was a prelude to great victory.

Sisera gathered a massive army and all of his chariots and came out in the valley to fight Barak and his forces. As Deborah and Barak stood on top of this mountain they would have seen a scary, highly prepared opposition.

HISTORICAL FACT #4 – Deborah announces victory and Barak attacks. **4:14-16**

Notice how this begins with the announcement of the Word of God: 1) God had given them victory; 2) God would go before them. According to **verse 14**, Barak and his 10,000 men charged straight into battle against an impressive enemy because God was on their side.

What makes this victory more amazing is that apparently God sent a ferocious rainstorm which spooked all of the horses pulling the iron chariots and flooded the valley and caused the men to flee on foot (Judges 5:21-22). They broke ranks and started running in every direction. The iron chariots were of no help against the power of God because God spooked the horses and the chariots got bogged down in the mud. So Barak took his 10,000 men against Israel's oppressors and he completely annihilated the enemies to the point that not one enemy soldier was left.

HISTORICAL FACT #5 – Sisera temporarily escapes and is ultimately killed . **4:17-21**

A massive manhunt was underway to try and track down Sisera who had escaped. More than likely Sisera felt he needed to make his way back to Jabin to tell him of the major defeat. Sisera felt he had a strong ally in Heber his traitor friend, so he fled to his house. **What Sisera did not know is that Heber's wife Jael was also a great woman of God.** She invited him into her tents. She gave him some milk and a delicious bowl of curds, or I like to call it cottage cheese (Judges 5:25). This would be his last meal before his execution.

Sisera then laid down to rest; so Jael covered him up, picked up a tent stake and drove it into his temple and killed him. This took amazing courage on her part. Sisera is a top military commander, but God gave her victory.

This is amazing, for God was sovereignly directing all events, even the events of a traitor. God knew that he could use Heber to draw Sisera to his tent so Jael could kill him.

HISTORICAL FACT #6 – The destruction of Jabin. **4:22-24**

God subdued Jabin the Canaanite king, and once again He had delivered Israel from her oppressor. Israel got herself into this mess and God got her out of the mess.

There is a tremendous principle to see here - when you are being dominated and intimidated by big things in your life, and the reason why is because you have made wrong decisions that put you into a mess, if you will turn to the Lord, God will deliver you.

God can use anyone who loves Him and His Word.

- 1) One woman was a woman of prominence who wanted to accurately communicate God's Word.
- 2) One man was a fearless warrior who wanted to know God's Word.
- 3) One woman was a housewife who wanted to defend God's Word and people.