



Deborah - Israel's Extraordinary Judge Judges 4 - 5

Introduction

Three men had been used by God to free Israel: Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar, who then judged Israel until their deaths. They were military heroes who became judges, a logical, familiar sequence. America's first president was a military hero, General George Washington, of whom it was said, "First in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen." Winning in war is proof of leadership, and a grateful populace votes its confidence. In America, Andrew Jackson, U. S. Grant, Benjamin Harrison, Teddy Roosevelt, and Dwight Eisenhower were military heroes who became presidents.

The fourth judge was an exception. Deborah was a woman and God provided a general, Barak, to work with her. Men and women are different, but both are made in God's image. Together they reflect the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Woman is no less made in His image than is man. Occasionally God likes to demonstrate that point, as He does with Deborah.

Outline of Judges 4-5

- I. Deborah and Barak - Judges 4:1-10
- II. Sisera and Jael - Judges 4:11-24
- III. Song of Deborah and Barak - Judges 5:1-31

I. Deborah and Barak - Judges 4:1-10

A. Deborah, the Fourth Judge - Judges 4:1-5

1. After Ehud's death - 4:1

When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did evil... Israel obeyed God for eighty years and the land had rest (Judges 3:30). Without Ehud's leadership, Israel turned away from God and the cycle began again.

2. Jabin, king of Hazor - 4:2-3

Whereas Ehud fought and judged in southern Israel, in the next cycle trouble came from the north, in the person of Jabin, a Canaanite king who reigned in Hazor, north of Galilee. Joshua fought a major battle there (Joshua 11:10). Sisera commanded Jabin's army. "Jabin" was probably a title, like Pharaoh.

Jabin and Sisera, with their nine hundred chariots, had harshly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years until they finally cried out to the Lord.

3. A prophetess - 4:4-5

According to verse 4, Deborah was already judging Israel. This alone was extraordinary. She was a homemaker, the wife of Lapidoth, a mother, and also leading Israel (Judges 5:7). As a prophetess, she knew God's word and declared it to the people because God had so gifted her. People came to her for counsel as she sat under the palm tree. It became known as *the palm tree of Deborah*, and was between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, the mid-section of Israel.

B. Deborah, The Commander of the Army - Judges 4:6-10

1. Summoned Barak - 4:6

Deborah means "honey-bee". Deborah recognized an enemy force gathering against Israel and like a queen bee, summoned Barak. All we know of Barak is that he was from Kedesh in Naphtali, which was north of Hazor. Deborah knew Barak was the man for the job and delivered God's message to him. *Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun.* This was his area and this was his mission.

2. Victory promised - 4:7

Against you I will deploy Sisera...with his chariots and his multitude,... and I will deliver him into your hand. The bad news for Barak was Sisera's chariots and multitude. The good news was victory guaranteed by Almighty God. We have the same good news because we have victory guaranteed in Jesus Christ.

3. Barak's response - 4:8

If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go. Barak was willing to go and fight, but felt the need for the spiritual support Deborah would provide.

4. Deborah's prophecy - 4:9-11

Deborah agreed to go, but rebuked Barak for his conditional obedience. *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.*

Being so willing to share the honors with one woman, Barak would have to share them with another as well.

Even so, Barak appears in the Faith Hall of Fame as one *who through faith subdued kingdoms* (Hebrews 11:32-33).

II. Sisera and Jael - Judges 4:11-24

A. The Battle - Judges 4:11-16

1. Heber the Kenite – 4:11

Near Barak's hometown of Kedesh lived Heber the Kenite, a descendant of Hobab, Moses' father-in-law. He had separated himself from the other Kenites and lived in a somewhat isolated area with his wife Jael. Heber reported Barak's troop movements to Sisera.

2. Sisera's advance – 4:12-14

Sisera moved his vast army and all nine hundred chariots of iron toward Mount Tabor, camping by the River Kishon. At Deborah's command, *Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has delivered Sisera into your hand*, Barak charged down the mountain with his ten thousand men and her assurance of God's promise ringing in his ears, *Has not the Lord gone out before you?*

3. Sisera's escape – 4:15-16

The battle went as prophesied and Barak won the day. Sisera leaped out of his chariot and fled on foot. Barak pursued the fleeing army of Canaanites in total victory all the way to Sisera's hometown, Harosh Hagoyim, but he did not find Sisera.

B. The Final Blow by Jael - Judges 5:17-24

1. Rest stop – 4:17-20

Sisera approached Heber's tent knowing of his peace with Jabin. Jael invited him in, saying, *Turn aside my lord, turn aside to me; do not fear*. Thirsty and weary, he asked for a drink. She gave him milk and covered him. Asking her to turn away any who might be looking for him, he fell asleep.

2. Jael's decisive action – 4:21

Jael found herself in a strategic position of power. She had the opportunity to rid Israel of a dread enemy who was bent on destroying them. Not bound by her husband's neutrality, she knew what to do. In the middle east, women did the heavy work, and still do, such as pitching tents. Jael was adept at handling tent pegs and hammers. With hammer in hand, she drove a tent peg through Sisera's temple.

Whatever one may think of her action, it took courage and it was for God's people. It was not for herself, in self-defense, since there was no danger to her. When Barak arrived, Jael invited him to view his dead foe.

Thanks to Jael, Barak's victory was complete. From then on, Jabin grew weaker, whereas, under Deborah, the Israelites grew stronger until Jabin was destroyed.

III. Song of Deborah and Barak - Judges 5:1-31

A. A Victor's Song of Triumph - Judges 5:1

There are three songs in scripture that are specifically songs of triumph.

1. Moses' Song of deliverance from Pharaoh

In Exodus 15, Moses composed an anthem to God's triumph over Pharaoh and his armies who drowned in the Red Sea. It was a triumph of redemption, for God had delivered His people from slavery to freedom and a whole new life.

*I will sing to the Lord,
For He has triumphed gloriously!....*

*Your right hand, O Lord, has become glorious in power;
Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy in pieces* (verses 1, 6).

2. Deborah's Song of triumph over Jabin

*Hear, O kings! Give ear, O princes!
I, even I, will sing to the Lord;
I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel* (verse 3).

3. Song of Moses and the Lamb

Exiled on Patmos, John, in Revelation 15, saw a vision of heaven and,

*a sea of glass mingled with fire,
and those who have the victory over the beast...
They sing the song of Moses and the Lamb,
saying,
Great and marvelous are Your works,
Lord God Almighty!
Just and true are Your ways,
O King of the saints.
Who shall not fear you, O Lord, and glorify Your name?
For You alone are holy.
For all nations shall come and worship before You,
For Your judgments have been manifested* (verses 3-4).

What is God doing in your life that you will praise Him for right now? What is your song of praise to Him? Will you sing it to Him now?

B. Comparing Past Triumphs to Present Conditions – Judges 5:2-9

1. Sinai

Deborah praised God for past victories, *When leaders led in Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves* under Moses, and the people received the law with signs and wonders.

2. Shamgar

However, in Deborah's time, the time of Shamgar and Jael, conditions became intolerable. The highways were dangerous for travelers and people stayed in their homes. They had chosen new gods, denied the Lord, and war threatened. Deborah decided enough was enough and arose to help the leaders.

3. Sympathy and duty

Deborah's heart went out to Shamgar and any other leaders who were trying to lead the people aright. She "put feet to her prayers" for them and became involved. *I Deborah arose, arose a mother in Israel.* She did something besides fret and stew. She was willing to light a candle rather than to curse the darkness. She did what she could, using the gifts God had given her, while keeping her priorities rightly aligned. She saw herself as primarily a mother who was also a prophetess.

C. Celebrating the Victory - Judges 5:10-31

1. Responsibility to celebrate – 5:10-12

Speak, you who ride on white donkeys, Who sit in judges' attire. The Lord's people should be quick to proclaim His victories. Is a testimony to God on your lips? Do you recount at the end of the day how the Lord has been good to you or answered your prayer? Are you always ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you (1 Peter 3:15)?

2. Merits and demerits - vs.13-18

The tribes who responded with fighting strength are commended. Ephraim, Benjamin, Zebulun, and Issachar were with Deborah and Barak. The men of Zebulun and Naphtali even risked their lives in the heights of battle.

The tribes which "sat this one out" are rebuked. Gilead would include the tribes which had settled east of the Jordan River. Reuben is named, but also included would be Gad and Manasseh. Dan stayed in their territory north of the Sea of Galilee, and Asher by the seashore.

As Deborah marked a division between the faithful tribes and those with *great resolves of heart*, so it will be at the Judgment Seat of Christ when all believers will have their works judged (Romans 14:10-12). All will receive either commendation or rebuke (Revelation 22:12). How we live now is all important to our status on that day.

3. The battle – 5:19-30

The intensity of the battle is described. Supernatural help is noted in a dramatic way. *The stars from their courses fought against Sisera. The torrent of Kishon swept them away.*

Jael's role is credited and her action extolled. *Most blessed among women is Jael.* The grief of the mother of Sisera, as a non-combatant who loved her son, is also memorialized.

4. One battle in a great war - 5:31

Deborah concludes with a glorious prayer,
*Thus let all your enemies perish, O Lord!
 But let those who love Him be like the sun,
 When it comes out in full strength.*

We can change the spelling of sun to S-o-n and anticipate full acknowledgment of His triumph.

Applications

1. In what ways can you proclaim our Lord's victory?
2. What gifts has God given you? How are you using your gifts to glorify God?
3. Who would be willing to serve if they had your support?
4. Who is on your heart to recruit for God's service?