**Judges 4 & 5**

**Chapter 4: Deborah & Barak**

Historical account of God’s deliverance of Israel through Deborah.

**Setting:**

- 1200-1145 BC,

- Northern Israel- the land the Israelites had not yet possessed because they failed to drive out the Canaanites, theoretically due to the strength of their military might (Judges 1:19 “iron chariots”). Israel controlled the hill country, not the plains. Tribes- Zebulun, Asher, Naphtali (northern) were unsuccessful in completely destroying the Canaanites in their territory, forced to co-exist with them (Judges 1:30-33).

-Judges 3:30 when Ehud was Judge Israel had 80 years of peace (longest period recorded in book of Judges.



**Act 1: Deborah’s Victory (4:1-16)**

4:1- Restart of the downward side of the Cycle. Ehud dies and once again the Israelites do evil in the eyes of the LORD. The human tendency to sin and idolatry. It is likely the Israelites did not perceive their actions as sin (much those in our time).

4:2- God’s response- disciplines His people. He acts consistently with His covenant disciplining His people with consequences after they sin and turn from Him. God sold them over to King Jabin who along with his general Sisera cruelly oppressed the Israelites. God gave them a stern warning (a promise) in Joshua 23:11-16 of the judgment and corrective actions if they disobeyed Him. “God permits obstacles so we’ll depend on Him”.

4:3- After 20 years of oppression, Israel in their desperation responds as they cried for help from the LORD (Hebrew- tsaaq). It is not specifically stated whether they had repentant hearts or not; most commentators believe so. “Crying out to God” is an act of desperation and a fervent expression of faith in God and trust in His goodness and power to act on your behalf. They “turn away from evil and turn to God”.

4:4-5 God’s response- to raise up a leader/Judge to deliver His people (and others).

*Who was Deborah?* The only female Judge. Most judges were military figures while Deborah is more of an administrator, judging & handling disputes. Other roles: Prophetess, wife, mother, and woman of great faith. A leader- “leaders are people w/ followers (volunteer to go, inspired).

*Why does God use Deborah?* Perhaps she was the only one listening to God and had a relationship with Him. Deborah means “honeybee”. What do we know about honeybees?

1. A Woman of Great Character (4:4-5) - stood firm in her faith and on the LORD. This made her stand out in the community. Israelites knew she was special and God was with her. She was obedient to the LORD and dependent on Him.
2. A Woman of Great Confidence (4:6-7) - speaks to Barak as God’s representative. Later proves her faith & confidence in God by going into battle (women were not taken to the battlefield in those days).
3. A Woman of Great Courage (4:9) – agrees to go to battle with Barak with a group of unskilled, relatively unarmed men to fight against a well-armed force with chariots.
4. A Woman of Great Compliments (5:2-3) – 1st thing she does after is praise & compliment the LORD for what He had done. *What is your first response when you receive relief from struggling/trial?* She praises the people who volunteered to fight and willingly offer themselves knowing the odds were against them.

*What does Deborah do?* 4:6-7 Summoned Barak “lightening” (75 miles away in Kedesh means “sanctuary”, it was “a refuge city” - to provide a safety net for one who accidentally killed his neighbor). Conveys God’s message & instructions. Reminds him that LORD has commanded him to lead an army to Mt Tabor to fight against Sisera and that they would be delivered into his hands.

4:8 - Barak’s Response– he responds with conditional obedience, an ultimatum, contingent on Deborah’s presence. Contrast to Deborah, Barak more concerned about his reputation (that is why he came down). Concerned about what people thought of him as he was a great military leader; he was afraid of failure as he knew of Sisera’s strength. He was unaware God set it up that way so he would depend on Him to remove the obstacles. God has been speaking to him, and has revealed his plan. He knows the truth that he should have faith and know God can deliver Israel, but he is powerless & afraid to act. Barak lacks faith, appears he wants to be assured of God’s presence or use Deborah’s gift to consult with her prior/during battle. (Sad- he had no assurance of God’s presence)

*Have you ever responded to God’s call passively? Or require proof from God to follow the call?*

God asks us to step forward in obedience in spite of circumstances, feelings, or consequences. When we do God promises to intervene and enable us when we act with courageous faith. God wants to glorify Himself through His people.

4:9 - Deborah’s response- is commendable. She doesn’t ridicule him, question his manhood or try to manipulate him. She simply reminds him of his responsibility before God and that God wanted to honor him. She promises to support Barak and go into battle with him. Due to his lack of faith the honor will go to a woman.

4:11 Heber the Kenite- descendants of Hobab, Moses father in-law, who accompanied Israel into the Promised Land and lived among them. Part the Midianite tribe. What is the significance of this verse? Heber separated himself from the rest of the Kenites and v17 we read he entered a covenant of peace with Jabin (close to God’s enemies). Trying to play both sides- neutral.

4:12-16 The Defeat of Sisera’s Army: battle scene the Jezreel Valley near the River Kishon. Barack and the Israelites go to Mt Tabor and this draws in Sisera, his chariots and army to them.

*Does this look like a fair fight?*

**Sisera’s Advantages** **Barak’s Advantages**

20 years Experience defeating Israel God

Cutting edge Weaponry (Iron Chariots)

Geography- valley/plain

V14 turning point of this chapter as Deborah issues a war cry and tells Barak to “arise, the LORD has given you Sisera and gone out before you”. This is the 2nd time she tells him God will bring victory to Israel. V15-16 the battle- the LORD routs Sisera and his army.

*What occurred to cause this dramatic victory? See Ch. 5:4-5, 20.*

**Act 2: Jael’s Victory (4:17-24)**

*Why does Sisera abandon his chariot?* See Ch. 5:4.

Sisera flees to the tent of the Canaanite ally, the clan of Heber the Kenite, for refuge and safety.

*What is Jael’s take on this situation? What is her response?*

Heber’s wife, Jael, is welcoming and treats him with great hospitality. Gives him a cover, warm milk, and agrees to be his look out.

In verse 21, Jael delivers justice through unique means. God works/delivers in unexpected ways by using unlikely people and uncommon means to accomplish His purposes. God calls on another heroic female leader to help deliver His people. Deborah’s prophecy was fulfilled as Sisera is killed by a woman, and the honor went to her. Deborah started the battle and Jael ended it.

4:23-24 The fall of King Jabin and the Canaanites. The victory at Mt Tabor was significant as God decimated much of the Canaanite army and their most valuable weapon 900 chariots. Jabin is later killed and his kingdom destroyed. Judges 5:31 then the land had peace/rest for 40 years. \**The real hero of the story- is God. He did it all.*

**Chapter 5: Song of Deborah**

The song of Deborah is a poetic account of God’s deliverance of Israel from King Jabin & SIsera. It helps fill in gaps of the story told in Chapter 4 and shows how God conquers all odds and redeems His people.

5:1-10 Deborah praises God for what He had done.

5:13-18 Description of the events and what Israel did. Those who heard the call and came to help. 5 Tribes commended- Zebulun, Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir, and Issachar. She calls out those that stayed home- Reuben, Gilead, Dan, and Asher.

This section reminds us that we must make a choice whether or not we will serve the LORD. It is easy to be passive, busy, or lazy and not serve. Our servanthood and leadership is critical for the church and to further God’s kingdom.

5:24:30 Deborah praises Jael for her courage and what she did for Israel.

5:31 Summary- God’s plan will always prevail, and He gives strength to all who call on His name.

**What Truths or Lessons can we learn from Deborah, Barak, and Jael?**

* When pressure, problems and crisis occur in your life- draw near to God and call out to Him for help. God cares for us, loves us, and is always faithful. He’ll strengthen your faith.
* God conquers all odds and can do extraordinary things through ordinary people (His people) who trust and obey Him.
* God use available people for His purpose. It is not about ability, but availability. God enables and empowers His people.
* All God requires of us is simple obedience (5:9, 12, 24).
* Be a person of character, reputations are destroyed when you cannot live up to others expectations.
* Receive your identity and value from the LORD. Your true identity is in Jesus Christ. Live for Him alone, not others. Let God define you, not people.
* God gives women and men the same spiritual gifts. We have different roles.
* When the leaders lead, the people praise the LORD (5:1,9).
* God curse spectators (5:23). Be active in the kingdom of God, use your talent, treasure, and time.

**Questions:**

1. What are the “iron chariots” in your life?
2. What resources are at your disposal against these obstacles? Will you depend on the LORD 1st?
3. Have you seen God remove obstacles before in your life? God has been faithful in the past
4. Have you seen God do the unexpected in your life? Would anyone like to share a story?
5. How am I like Barak? When you are filled with doubt and fear, how do you usually respond? What should you do?
6. What can I do as a leader to ensure my life makes a lasting difference? Whom can I transfer truth to so the next generation with grow in godliness? What will you do this week to impact the next generation?
7. What has God called me to do? What can I do to step out in faith and obedience?
8. Obedience often leads to many blessings, how have you experienced this biblical principle in your own Christian life?