The song of Deborah is a revealing commentary on the circumstances of Israel’s victory

- We’ve studied the first part of that song so far, and what’s becoming clear is that Israel is no longer operating as a single nation under the Lord
  - Jewish society is fracturing
  - Men aren’t leading as they once did
  - Women are carrying burdens they ought not bear
  - People are doing what’s right in their own eyes

- As the people enjoyed the prosperity of the land, they sank into idolatry
  - And then the Lord struck Israel with calamity with the intent to wake them from their unrighteousness
  - After a period of time, they would awake, and He would restore them
  - Yet each time, that restoration has become a bit harder to accomplish

- Chapter 5 is Deborah’s honest reflection on the way Israel obtained victory over the Canaanite king
  - In the first part, she highlighted the weakness of Israel in the face of their enemy
  - And by contrast, the Lord’s overcoming power to win the battle on Israel’s behalf
  - So she takes time to praise the Lord for the victory

- Because as we will see in parts 2 and 3 today, the people certainly weren’t united to win the battle
  - And in the end, the victory is credited to a woman in a tent, Jael
  - And because of her bravery, the nation will see a period of rest again
We’ll read part two in a couple of sections

**Judg. 5:12** “Awake, awake, Deborah;  
Awake, awake, sing a song!  
Arise, Barak, and take away your captives, O son of Abinoam.

**Judg. 5:13** “Then survivors came down to the nobles;  
The people of the LORD came down to me as warriors.

**Judg. 5:14** “From Ephraim those whose root is in Amalek came down,  
Following you, Benjamin, with your peoples;  
From Machir commanders came down,  
And from Zebulun those who wield the staff of office.

**Judg. 5:15** “And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah;  
As was Issachar, so was Barak;  
Into the valley they rushed at his heels;  
Among the divisions of Reuben  
There were great resolves of heart.

**Judg. 5:16** “Why did you sit among the sheepfolds,  
To hear the piping for the flocks?  
Among the divisions of Reuben  
There were great searchings of heart.

**Judg. 5:17** “Gilead remained across the Jordan;  
And why did Dan stay in ships?  
Asher sat at the seashore,  
And remained by its landings.

**Judg. 5:18** “Zebulun was a people who despised their lives even to death,  
And Naphtali also, on the high places of the field.

Part 2 of the song is focused on who participated in the battle, starting with Deborah and Barak

- In v.12 we’re reminded that the Lord dictated the timing of the battle
  - He called Deborah and Barak to move when the time was right
  - We know already that the Lord won the battle
  - But now we’re learning that the Lord selected the timing for the battle as well

- The Lord called Deborah to “awake” and Barak to “arise”
  - Deborah is told to awake so she can sing a song
• Singing a song represents her prophesying the word of the Lord
• Her role was to speak the instructions of the Lord on cue
  o And Barak was told to arise, meaning to get up in response to the word of the Lord
  • And as he arose, he would take the enemy captive
  • Meaning, he only needed to respond to the call of God’s word to find success
  o This is another universal pattern among all God’s people
  • Every good work begins with a call from God by the word of God
  • And all the people of God are expected to do is arise to obey what they learn
  • You can’t obey what you don’t hear
  • And you can’t please the Lord if you hear but do not obey
  • The Lord used a woman to issue the call and a man to lead Israel into obedience
• As Barak stepped forward to answer Deborah’s call, his response led some men from surrounding tribes of Israel to join him
  o Notice in v.14 in addition to those expected from Zebulun, a few men joined from three other tribes
    • Ephraim joined and some from Benjamin
    • And commanders from Machir, which is the name for western portions of Manasseh
    • Then in v.15 we hear that the leaders of Issachar also participated
  o Geographically, these four tribes are more or less on the way from Ephraim to the area of the battle
    • So it seems Barak picked up support as he traveled to the valley to fight
    • The Lord brought these four groups alongside Barak to encourage him as he prepare to engage in a battle he had no idea how to win
• When you step out in response to the word of God and act in faith, you can be sure the Lord will show Himself in unexpected ways to encourage you
  
  o I suspect Barak needed all the encouragement he could get
    • Remember, he needed Deborah’s company just to act in the first place
    • And yet the Lord did not despise his fear
    • The Lord understood his flesh was weak, so He strengthened Barak’s faith
  
  o But pay attention to the order: insisted that Barak move forward in faith, as weak as it was
    • Once Barak was moving, the Lord was ready to bring others alongside Barak to encourage his obedience
    • But this is the order God requires
    • Hear His word, step out in faith, then receive confirmation
    • Like He said to Abraham: “Go to the place I will show you…”
  
  o Barak’s primary army was prepared in Zebulun and Naphtali, but the Lord sent these extra recruits to make sure Barak knew the Lord was with him
    • Someone has to hear God’s calling first
    • Someone has to take the first step of faith
    • God appoints men and women to serve as leaders for that reason...to get something started among His people
    • Then when the leader needs encouragement, the Lord will bring others to join the work and confirm the Lord’s calling
    • For Barak, the Lord grew his army around him even as he walked to the battle
  
• But unfortunately, the society of Israel wasn’t united in this effort
  
  o In fact, most of the tribes were incapable of mustering the conviction or courage to respond to the word of the Lord
    • Notice at the end of v.15, we’re told there was a great resolve of the heart among Reubenites when they heard of Barak’s call
• They recognized this was an opportunity to defeat the enemy in the land

• They heard that Deborah had declared the time had come for victory

• They were all for kicking the Canaanites out!

  o But in v.16 we learn they remained with their flocks and didn’t join the battle

  • They were content to enjoy their life of leisure rather than do the hard work of responding to the call of the Lord

  • And like Reuben, the tribes of Gad and eastern Manasseh (called Gilead) stayed put

  • And the tribe of Dan stayed on ships, indicating they continued in their way of life in trading on the sea

  • Likewise, Asher stayed on the seashore working the docks

  o This is the other side of the coin

  • We won’t get everyone among God’s people moving in response to God’s call

  • Some simply won’t make the trip

  • As a pastor and Bible teacher, I see this pattern first-hand

  • We can emphasize the call of scripture and call people to respond, but sometimes people prefer the life they have over the one God is offering

  o There’s something in the world they prefer

  • Maybe it’s the security of their current lifestyle

  • Maybe it’s a fear of the unknown

  • Maybe it’s just inertia

  • In all cases, it’s the mistake that Jesus described this way:

  **John 12:25** “He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.”
• Look at v.18, and you see Zebulun and Naphtali making the right bargain
  o Deborah says they despised their lives to the death and were willing to die on the high places
    • The high places refers to the pagan worship locations of the Canaanites
    • This was a battle over worshipping the true God instead allowing pagans gods to pollute the land
    • And these two tribes were willing to leave their lives behind - even lose their earthly lives - to answer the call of the Lord
  o That’s who you want standing with you in ministry of any kind
    • You want people who make answering the call of the Lord more important that fitting into the world
    • The Lord wants those people too
    • People who will serve Him knowing that this world is in the process of passing away and not worth preserving
    • As Jesus commanded

Luke 9:62 But Jesus said to him, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

• Notice the fractured nature of the culture? A few are following, and a group are strongly committed, but many others are indifferent
  o Now you see the effect of doing what is right in your own eyes
    • God’s people were making judgments of when and how to obey God based on circumstances and feelings
    • They were searching their hearts instead of searching the scriptures and doing what they read
    • When God spoke to them through a prophetess, they treated it as optional advice
    • When God’s appointed military leader began to fight, some shrugged their shoulders
We need to guard against this same kind of complacency and self-satisfaction in our pursuit of the Kingdom

- We have battles that need to be fought
- From time to time, the Lord will place a call upon our lives
- He'll speak to us from His word

But don't evaluate your choice to obey based on feelings or circumstances

- Don't lift your hand from the plow and look back at the farmhouse
- Don't be distracted by the life you're leaving behind
- Keep eyes for eternity and consider what you're gaining

Then Deborah describes the battle and we finally learn how the people of Israel were able to defeat an army without even a single decent weapon

Judg. 5:19  “The kings came and fought;
Then fought the kings of Canaan
At Taanach near the waters of Megiddo;
They took no plunder in silver.

Judg. 5:20  “The stars fought from heaven,
From their courses they fought against Sisera.

Judg. 5:21  “The torrent of Kishon swept them away,
The ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon.
O my soul, march on with strength.

Judg. 5:22  “Then the horses’ hoofs beat
From the dashing, the dashing of his valiant steeds.

Judg. 5:23  ‘Curse Meroz,’ said the angel of the LORD,
‘Utterly curse its inhabitants;
Because they did not come to the help of the LORD,
To the help of the LORD against the warriors.’

The battle took place in the Jezreel Valley at Taanach, which was an ancient settlement about 5 miles southeast of Migiddo

Remember, the army of the Canaanites had moved to the far west to the Kishon river valley, which is about 15 miles northwest of Taanach

- That river is fed from springs and rainfall on Mt. Carmel
In v.19 Deborah says the army didn’t plunder silver

In other words, the Israelites didn’t conquer the cities of the Canaanites by overwhelming them in might

Rather, Deborah says in v.20 that the battle was won by the “stars” of heaven

- In scripture, the word star can mean a little object or it can stand as a symbol for an angel
  - In this context, it seems to mean the angels battled for Israel
  - Specifically, they angels brought torrents of water in v.21
  - Those torrents of water rained down on Mt. Carmel causing the Kishon river valley to flood

- As the valley flooded, it made the entire valley muddy and guess what doesn’t work very well in deep mud? Chariots and horses
  - In v.22 Deborah describes the hooves of the horses beating the ground
  - In the original Hebrew, it says the horses’ heels were broken by the prancing in the mud

- This explains how Israel was able to triumph over a superior army

  - They Canaanites were superior because of their chariots
    - But take their chariots away, and they were just men
    - And a larger, motivated army can defeat a smaller one

  - The faith of these men was rewarded in the end
    - They entered the battle willing to die
    - But in the end the Lord had a better plan

  - Do you want to see miracles in your life?
    - Step out in faith to the Lord’s call, and watch what He does next
    - Or stay on your ships or by your flocks and never see the power of the Lord working with your weakness

- But Deborah doesn’t want us to forget the main theme of this section
Not everyone in Israel responded and even among Naphtali, some failed to respond
  • She curses the town of Meroz, which was a town in Naphtali just west of the Hazor
  • Even though Naphtali was a huge contributor to the army, there were pockets of the tribe that wouldn’t engage
  • Perhaps the proximity of this town to the Canaanite king’s headquarters in Hazor scared them into inaction
  • Once again, they preferred this life over the kingdom of God

This is the lesson of part 2
  • The contrast between the brave men who answered the call
  • And those who wouldn’t
  • The society of Israel in the time of Judges was marked by fractures and waning willingness to hear the Lord and answer

Here’s a people only a few generations removed from those who saw the Lord part the Red Sea, and yet they are indifferent to following God
  • It’s a reminder to all God’s people of how easily our flesh can re-assert control over our lives
  • God has done amazing things in each of our lives, not the least is saving us by faith
  • And yet we’re still prone to wandering or ignoring His call
  • If we’re shaking our finger at these senseless Israelites, don’t be too quick to judge
  • Let’s take our own advice and be sure we’re always ready for God’s call to serve Him and never too comfortable to respond

Part three of Deborah’s song celebrates the woman who ultimately brought the battle to it’s conclusion

**Judg. 5:24** “Most blessed of women is Jael, The wife of Heber the Kenite; Most blessed is she of women in the tent.
Judg. 5:25  “He asked for water and she gave him milk;  
    In a magnificent bowl she brought him curds.
Judg. 5:26  “She reached out her hand for the tent peg,  
    And her right hand for the workmen’s hammer.  
    Then she struck Sisera, she smashed his head;  
    And she shattered and pierced his temple.
Judg. 5:27  “Between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay;  
    Between her feet he bowed, he fell;  
    Where he bowed, there he fell dead.
Judg. 5:28  “Out of the window she looked and lamented,  
    The mother of Sisera through the lattice,  
    ‘Why does his chariot delay in coming?  
    Why do the hoofbeats of his chariots tarry?’
Judg. 5:29  “Her wise princesses would answer her,  
    Indeed she repeats her words to herself,
Judg. 5:30  ‘Are they not finding, are they not dividing the spoil?  
    A maiden, two maidens for every warrior;  
    To Sisera a spoil of dyed work,  
    A spoil of dyed work embroidered,  
    Dyed work of double embroidery on the neck of the spoiler?’
Judg. 5:31  “Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD;  
    But let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might.”

And the land was undisturbed for forty years.

• Deborah retraces the steps of Jael as she courageously defeats Sisera

  o Deborah calls her the most blessed of women
    • That reminds us of what the angel says about Mary in Luke 1
    • These two women are connected in the sense that both are chosen by God to perform a role well beyond their station in life
    • Mary was a humble virgin, the last person on earth you would expect to give birth to the Messiah
    • And Jael was a wife holding down the tent, so she is the last person you might expect to win a decisive military battle
  o But by God’s power, both of these women did miraculous things to free God’s people from slavery to a powerful enemy
    • Jael freed Israel from slavery to the Canaanite king and his forces
• Mary gave birth to Messiah, Who frees His people from slavery to the enemy
  o Deborah graphically recounts the way Jael won by killing Sisera, because we can't get enough of that story
    • But notice the imagery of the mighty warrior lying between the feet of this woman
    • The sense is of a role reversal
    • Earlier he invaded a woman’s tent, which normally would have meant only one thing
    • Instead, he’s the one lying between her feet
  • Then to finish the song, Deborah creates the third and final contrast in the song
    o In v.28 she introduces a new imagined character to the story
      • Deborah imagines what the mother of Sisera is doing now that her son has been killed in this secret way
      • The mother is described as looking out her kitchen window waiting for her son to come home from the battle
      • She is a pitiful woman, waiting in vain for a son to return
    o When Sisera delays in returning, her handmaidens give her reassuring reasons for his delay
      • Surely he's dividing the spoil, they say
      • Dividing all the fine embroidery and dyed cloth
      • And in a coarse detail, the maidens says there must have been two Jewish maidens for every warrior
      • What they mean of course is that the raping of the Jewish women must be taking Sisera's army a little longer than usual
      • It’s like they’re saying, “Oh I’m sure he just got held up at work…”
    o This comment suggests that Jael’s risk of being raped by Sisera was well founded
      • She was clearly acting in self-defense even if her motives were mixed
• She has taken a son from his mother
• But it was the proper response to the son’s evil ways
• And his mother will suffer with him

• The contrast here is easy to see: a poor, but triumphant Jael contrasted with a rich, but devastated mother of Sisera
  o This is a reminder that those who oppose God and God’s people will perish
    • But those who love the Lord and His people will triumph
    • No one would have predicted that Jael would have gained the upper hand over Sisera’s mother
      - Much less over Sisera himself
    • But in the end, the tables were turned
  o Remember that as you decide between following the Lord or seeking comfort in the world
    • The world may appear to be the better option to our flesh
    • But one day the tables will be turned
    • The last will be first
    • The least among us will be the greatest
    • Those who have made serving the Lord their priority will see the reward in the Kingdom