

Judges 5B

- 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
- 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
- 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
 - 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
 - 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
 - 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
 - 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..."
 - 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
 - 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!
- 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
- 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
- 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
 - 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
 - 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 than 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
 - 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 calls 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 reassert 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 its 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
 - 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
 - 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
- 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
 - 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
 - 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..."
 - 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
 - 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
 - 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