

Bible Studies for Life: July 28

Barak • Judges 4:4-8,12-16; 5:1-5

By Jessica McMillan



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Judges 4:4-8

During the period of “judges,” the established pattern was that the Israelites would do “evil in the sight of the Lord” until they got themselves into a dire situation, then the Lord would raise up a leader/judge to rescue them. Over and over, God met his people in the midst of their mess, and He redeemed them. The pattern would begin again with several decades of peace until God would hand them over to an enemy because of their unfaithfulness and idolatry, thus continuing the cycle.

The background for the story of Deborah and Barak is that the Canaanite enemy was actually already inside Israel’s borders. The Canaanite army was led by king Jabin, and his commander, Sisera. Prior to this encounter, Ehud led the people into an extended period of peace following the death of king Eglon. Upon Ehud’s death, the people started the cycle over of doing “evil in the sight of the Lord,” and being handed over to the enemy by God. This time, God raised up a new leader – Deborah. She called on Barak to lead an army of ten thousand men so that she could lead Sisera into their path. Barak only agreed to go if Deborah would go with him. This may be an indication that Barak saw Deborah as a symbol of God’s presence, since it was God who brought her to leadership as His mouthpiece for that specific time. Nevertheless, when called upon for duty, Barak did not have the confidence in himself as a leader to do it alone. The enemy had a large army with iron chariots, and Barak became overwhelmed.

Judges 4:12-16

Sisera's entire army fell on the day of battle, and he fled on foot. He met a woman named Jael, who was the wife of Heber. Because of a friendly alliance between Jabin and Heber, Sisera felt safe to hide out there. Besides, Jael invited him into her tent for "safety." She gave him some milk and covered him with a nice warm blanket, and he soon fell asleep. While he slept, Jael drove a tent stake in his temple, and he died. About that time, Barak comes riding by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael invited him in to see the man who he was chasing. Even though Deborah had encouraged Barak that God would be with him, Barak was willing to let women, Deborah and Jael, receive the credit.

Judges 5:1-5

Chapter 4 is the written account of the story, then Chapter 5 is the story retold in a song of praise to God, sung by Deborah and Barak, for the victory that had occurred. Although there was great rejoicing that day, Deborah's warning to Barak came true. He would indeed be humiliated because God delivered Sisera "into the hands of a woman" (4:9 NIV). They won the battle, the women got the credit for it, and they began the cycle again with forty years of peace before the Lord delivered them once again into the hands of an enemy.

This passage reminds us that God knows our human limitations and He still uses us anyway. Even when we are overwhelmed with the weight of what is going on around us, we can trust that God is still sovereign, He will go with us, and He will receive the ultimate victory.

McMillan is a member of Prentiss Church, Prentiss.