

Judges 4:1-5:31
Deborah and Barak

Introduction

1. As we discovered over the last two weeks, the book of Judges is a book about deliverance
2. Israel had a habit...a pattern...of disobeying God's commands by committing acts of wickedness and idolatry
3. Each time, God would cause Israel's enemies to conquer and oppress them as an act of divine judgment and chastisement
4. And each time, Israel would suffer until they could take it no longer and then cry out to God for help
5. And each time, God would answer by raising up someone to deliver them; these are the 15 judges highlighted in the book
6. We've already seen Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar and today move on to the fourth judge, Deborah
7. At this point, Israel has been in the land for approximately 150 years (if we take the years of oppression and peace given in the text as sequential)
8. And, once again we see the same pattern of apostasy, oppression, a call for help and God's deliverance

A. Israel oppressed again (4:1-3)

1. Israel commits apostasy again (1): **"Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died."**
 - a. The text tells us this took place after Ehud died—this is the pattern as described in the introduction to the book (2:19)
 - b. The text also calls what they did **"evil"**:
 - 1) Nine times in this book the Lord uses the word **"evil"** to describe Israel's behavior
 - 2) This wasn't just idol worship, they were sacrificing their children and engaging in all kinds of immoral behavior as part of the Baal cult
 - 3) What they were doing was outright wickedness
 - c. We are also told that they did this **"again"**:
 - 1) It was not only a repeat offense, but an ongoing and continual behavior
 - 2) Block, in his commentary on Judges calls it a "relapse of a pattern of behavior toward paganism"
2. The LORD chastises Israel (2): **"And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; and the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim."**
 - a. Like the episodes before this, this is a **DIVINE** act of judgment and chastisement—**"And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin"**
 - b. God used one of Israel's enemies as His agent:
 - 1) This time it was a Canaanite king named Jabin and his chief military commander, Sisera
 - 2) The two cities mentioned, Hazor and Harosheth-hagoyim, were north of the Sea of Galilee

- 3) At one point prior to this Hazor was the largest and main controlling city of all of Canaan
 - 4) It was destroyed by Joshua during the conquest when it was ruled by a king of the same name, Jabin (Joshua 11)—in fact, it was the only mound cities that Joshua burned with fire to completely destroy it (Joshua 11:13)
 - 5) By this time, however, the city had been resurrected as a royal city and military headquarters, possibly by some of the original royal family
 - 6) **NOTE: What we have here is a perfect example of the consequences of Israel's disobedience and failure to drive out the inhabitants of the land.**
- c. According to the end of verse 3, the result was severe and overwhelming oppression::
- 1) Jabin's army was a powerhouse with over 900 iron chariots
 - 2) The Hebrew word for oppressed here means "**to squeeze**" and is the same word used to describe Balaam's donkey squeezing up against the wall crushing Balaam's foot (Numbers 22:25; 2 Kings 6:32)
 - 3) Generally, when one nation conquered another the inhabitants, if not killed, were put to forced labor, tributes were collected and paid to the king of the conquering nation, and often women were taken as wives (or raped)
 - 4) The text doesn't say explicitly what parts of Israel were under Jabin's oppression, but based on the number of tribes that came out to assist in defeating Jabin, it's likely that he oppressed a large portion of Northern Israel, but probably most severely the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun.
 - 5) Deborah describes this time in her song in chapter 5 (vs. 6-9):
 - a) People avoided the highways when traveling, and instead used the backroads (5:6)
 - b) The rural villages ("**peasantry**") were deserted, probably because people moved into the cities for safety (5:7)
 - c) War was imminent (8a)
 - d) Israel lacked soldiers (8b-9)
 - 6) According to verse 3, this lasted for 20 years

B. Israel cries out to the Lord for help (4:3a)

1. Israel cried out to God out of desperation (3a): "**The sons of Israel cried to the LORD; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years.**"
2. Notice that the text does not mention repentance directly; it doesn't even allude to it
3. In fact, based on the introduction to the book, as well as the pattern throughout the book, any repentance was likely empty and meaningless

C. God raises up Deborah to deliver Israel (4:3b-24)

1. We are introduced to Deborah (3b-5): "**Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. 5 She used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment.**"
 - a. She was a prophetess (4a)
 - b. She was married (4b)
 - c. She was a judge—used here to refer to her role as a litigator (i.e. matters of Law, civil cases, etc.) (4c & 5c)

- d. She was from the hill country of Ephraim (which was in Central Israel west of the Jordan River)
2. Deborah summons Barak and conveys God’s command (6-10):
 - a. Barak was the military commander
 - b. He was from Kedesh which was way up in Northern Israel in the tribe of Naphtali—It was one of the six sanctuary cities (or cities of refuge)
 - c. Through Deborah, the Lord commands Barak to gather 10,000 men from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun (just to the southwest of Naphtali) and march to Mount Tabor which is about 15 miles Southwest of the Sea of Galilee (6)
 - d. These two tribes were singled out in 1:29-33 as some of the tribes that had failed to drive out the Canaanites
 - e. God would then “**draw out**” Sisera’s chariots and troops to the Kishon river which was near Mt. Tabor and deliver him into Barak’s hands (7)
 3. Barak’s response (8): “**Then Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go."**
 - a. Barak agrees to obey, but only under one condition: Deborah must go with him (8):
 - 1) Some see this as a lack of faith
 - 2) However, another possibility is that he simply did not want to depart without having God’s prophet, His representative, with him
 - 3) His mention in the Hebrews Hall of Faith (11:32) might lend itself to the latter interpretation, though that can’t be conclusive
 - b. Deborah agrees to go with him, but with another condition: if she goes, the honor of the victory will not go to him but to a woman (9): “**She said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the honor shall not be yours on the journey that you are about to take, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman." Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh.**”
 - 1) At first reading, it’s easy to assume the woman would be Deborah
 - 2) However, as we will see, God had someone else in mind and it will reveal His sovereign hand in delivering Israel
 - c. So, Barak does what he is commended, gathers the army and heads to Mt. Tabor (10)
 4. God defeats the Canaanite army before Israel (11-16)
 - a. In verse 11 we have this seemingly insignificant comment about a man named Heber—we’ll get to him in a minute
 - b. When Sisera gets word of Barak’s army, he gathers his forces and heads for the valley with his chariots and troops just as God said (12-13)
 - c. At Deborah’s command, Barak and the Israelites head down from the mountain and attack (14)
 - d. The LORD “**routed**” Sisera and his army (15-16):
 - 1) The basic meaning of the Hebrew word for “routed” when used negatively (like it is here) is to harass, trouble or vex (i.e. “**the LORD harassed...**”)
 - 2) According to Deborah’s song, the LORD made it rain (5:4) and the Kishon river flooded (5:21) which caused the horses and chariots to struggle in the mud (5:22)

- e. Israel annihilates the Canaanite army (“**not a man was left**”) with only Sisera escaping to the North (15-16)
5. Finally, Sisera is killed by a woman, just as Deborah prophesied (17-24):
- a) This is where it gets really cool because **we really see God’s sovereignty at work**
 - b) Remember that seemingly insignificant comment about Heber from v. 11?
 - c) Well, **it just so happens** that Heber was a Kenite
 - d) The Kenites **just so happened to be** descendants of Moses’ father-in-law and they were always friendly toward Israel—some even traveled with Israel during the exodus
 - e) They originally settled near Jericho, but then moved to the Negev (southern region) in Judah and lived among the Israelites
 - f) However, **it just so happened** that Heber didn’t live with his people--at some point he moved way up north and **just happened** to plant his family near where this future battle would take place
 - g) It also **just so happens** that he was at peace with Jabin, the King of Hazor, and Sisera his commander
 - h) This is important because it **just so happened** that Sisera fled to Heber’s home town in search of protection
 - i) Unfortunately for him, it **just so happened** that Heber’s wife was home, caught wind of it and invited him into her tent with the promise of protection and some milk and cookies
 - j) It also **just so happened** that she wasn’t apparently all that fond of Jabin or his commander and she drove a tent peg through his head

Conclusion and Take Away

1. So, what is the take away in all this
2. Obviously, I was being a little facetious there—those things didn’t just “happen”
3. Each and every one of these “coincidences” with Heber were planned in advance by God:
 - a) From the Kenites traveling with Israel during the Exodus
 - b) To their friendly ties with Israel
 - c) To their settling in the land with them
 - d) To Heber deciding to move way up north, alone and far away from his clan
 - e) To the peace between Heber and Jabin
 - f) To Sisera’s flight to Heber’s home town
 - g) To Jael’s invitation and offer of false protection to Sisera
 - h) All of this was orchestrated by God and used for His purpose and plan for delivering Israel from their enemies on this day
4. This portrays one of the major over-arching themes of this passage—and in fact this book—which is the amazing sovereignty of God
5. Everything else in the passage points to God’s sovereignty
 - a) V. 2: “**And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan...**”
 - b) V. 7: “**Go...I will draw out to you Sisera...and I will give him into your hand.**”
 - c) V. 14: “**For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hands; the LORD has gone out before you.**”
 - d) V. 15: “**The LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army...**”
 - e) V. 23: “**So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan...**”
 - f) Even Deborah’s song reveals this (5:1-5) by giving all the glory to God