

JUDGES SESSION #7

Welcome back to “Judges”! We pick up the story of Deborah & Barak in chapters 4 & 5...
“When leaders lead, when the people willingly offer themselves, wow! bless the Lord!”

[E. The FOLLOWERS]

Who were the followers here?

- **4:10** tells us that the 2 main tribes who responded *positively* were those of **Naphtali & Zebulun** (“and Barak called Naphtali and Zebulun to Kedesh”)
 - **Barak’s** home was in Naphtali
 - the tribe of **Issachar** also came (as **5:15** tells us) ...and this is where **Deborah** was from
 - and 5:14 includes **Ephraim & Benjamin** in the action; these were tribes living in the area where Deborah *currently* lived & ministered
- ...which could lead us to conclude that motivation probably works best with those *near* you

Judg 5:14

From Ephraim *were* those whose roots were in Amalek.

- **Ephraim** is assoc. somehow here with Amalek, that ancient enemy of God & His people; either in terms of occupying the land Amalek used to live in, or perhaps a reference to the idea that God’s people (Ephraim) were once God’s enemies too just like Amalek
- ...**seedy (unrespectable) origins/backgrounds/associations** are no reason not to join the Lord’s army – after all, 1 Cor. 1:27 tells us that God “chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things...so that no one may boast before Him.”

Judg 5:14

After you, Benjamin, with your peoples...

- **Benjamin** - the smallest tribe
 - ...being **small** is also no reason not to join the Lord’s army; you *can* be too BIG to be used by God, but you cannot be too SMALL
- Naphtali, Zebulun, Issachar, Ephraim & Benjamin all responded positively to the leadership of Deborah & Barak, and got involved in God’s cause against the Canaanites
- but the song in chapter 15 also gives us the other side of the picture: there were 4 tribes with a **RELUCTANT** spirit

Judg 5:15b-17

Among the divisions of **Reuben**

There were great resolves of heart.

16 Why did you sit among the sheepfolds,

To hear the pipings for the flocks?

The divisions of Reuben have great searchings of heart.

17 **Gilead** stayed beyond the Jordan,

And why did **Dan** remain on ships?* (or “at ease”)

Asher continued at the seashore,

And stayed by his inlets.

a) **Reuben**

- **emotionally** moved (“great resolves of heart, great searchings of heart”), but **no action**
 - ...a poetic repetition of their response, but with a significant difference
 - “great *resolves* of heart” ... then “great *searchings* of heart”
- evidently they are emotionally stirred at the beginning, and as a result make some kind of ‘resolve’ to do something – but they don’t actually go any further; *no practical action results* – and so this emotional condition deteriorates to simply ‘searchings of heart’
- it’s OK to be emotionally moved by God’s call to us in some area of life; but we dare not leave it simply in the emotional arena – we must take the next crucial step and put our **resolve into practical action** if we want any good to result

b) **Gilead** (this name refers to the tribe of Gad & the half tribe of Manasseh, who both decided to live in Gilead, on the east side of Jordan, rather than in the Promised Land itself]

- this group had already cut off **fellowship** with the other tribes, and were very isolated; now they have **no enthusiasm for God's work**
- the Canaanite problem is rather far away from them and they don’t sense any need to move out of their cozy comfort zone and do anything to help
- they highlight for us the **danger** of **pulling back from fellowship** with other believers
 - as Heb. 10:25 warns us:
 - “Let us not neglect our church meetings, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near.”
(The Living Bible)
 - sadly this is happening in shocking numbers in our day – estimates are as high as **25 million Christians** in North America who no longer attend any church!
- ...but like Gilead, cutting ourselves off from fellowship will too often result in a cooling of enthusiasm for God’s work
- Gilead’s lack of response also reminds us that we can too often be like them when it comes to **needs that are geographically far away** from where we are – and even though the situation we hear about in that far-off place involves fellow believers or some valuable extension of God’s kingdom we don’t want to help because we are **not personally affected**

c) **Dan**

- this tribe never realized its potential under God and later in this book of Judges this tribe runs into very serious problems (as we will see)
- even back in Joshua 19 they seemed dissatisfied with their situation and were a tribe that never settled down properly ...eventually pushing up north looking for a home
- like the Gileadites they could only see their own situation; **self-centered**; so they stayed where they were, “in ships”

d) **Asher**

- here was a tribe with **no vision**; their life was entirely focussed on their work (a seashore tribe dependent on ships & trading)
- how much we modern Christians can be like them! ...so engrossed in the business and busyness of life that we cannot raise our heads or eyes to see what God sees, or to sense His heartbeat for a needy world

...none of these 4 tribes ever again made a significant contribution to God's cause (with the possible exception of a brief war against the Hagarites – recorded in 1 Chron. 5)

- they lived for themselves; they were **afraid to risk what they had**...so in the end – ironically – they **lost** what they had (Jesus graphically described this attitude in the parable of the talents, in Luke 19)

There were lots of reasons to criticize these tribes. But why does the Scripture specifically blame or censure them?

...not because they failed to come to help other tribes; but because they failed to come to help **GOD!**

Judg 5:23

²³'Curse Meroz,' said the angel* of the Lord,
'Curse its inhabitants bitterly,
Because they did not come to the **help of the Lord**,
To the **help of the Lord** against the mighty.'

- **sin** is not only a doing of wrong; it is **not doing** something that is **right** (as James 4:17 puts it – “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.”)

- nevertheless, God used the leadership of Deborah & Barak to mobilize a little army of motivated followers who were willing to get involved, willing to “come to the help of the Lord”

- visualizing these ordinary, unarmed farmers facing a huge professional army reminds me of one of the **ironies surrounding “iron”** in the story

- the Canaanites under King Jabin tried to get a monopoly on iron in Palestine
- but they were defeated by God’s hidden “iron” weapon: His obedient, motivated people

- in Russia some years ago, the Moscow Baptist Church had an attendance of 6,000 and the participation level was almost 100 percent. When the pastor was asked the reason for such a high level of commitment & involvement he replied, "In Russia, we have **no four-wheel Christians.**" He coined this phrase to describe people who ride to church

(1)for their baptism, (2)for the Easter morning service, (3)for the Christmas program, and (4)for their funeral. — but *his* congregation were **not** “four-wheel Christians”; their love for God motivated them to total commitment: like the people in Deborah’s day, they “willingly offered themselves”

- *every church* needs people like that

[F. **THE RESULT**]

So, what was the RESULT of the battle against the Canaanites?

Judg 4:15-16

¹⁵ And the Lord routed Sisera and all *his* chariots and all *his* army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from *his* chariot and fled away on foot. ¹⁶ But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth Hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left.

- the outcome of this one battle was to begin to strengthen the Israelites in overcoming the enemy so that vs. 24 says, “And from that time on Israel became stronger and stronger against King Jabin, until he and all his people were destroyed.”
- the total victory was not accomplished in one battle; but this one did mark a turning point: the beginning of the end, thanks to Deborah’s leadership, Barak’s cooperation, and God’s power
- notice that the Canaanites had an especially fearsome advantage – they possessed the “cruise missiles” or “stealth bombers” of that era: **iron chariots**
- these 900 iron chariots were the enemy’s greatest **asset**, but God turned it into their greatest **liability**
...apparently God sent a flash flood down the Kidron River at the crucial moment of battle & they got bogged down in the mud & water:

Judg 5:21

the torrent of Kishon swept them away,
That ancient torrent, the torrent of Kishon.

- God is a Master at turning assets into liabilities (and the other way round too!)
- also notice that Baal, whom the Canaanites worshipped, was supposed to be the god of the **storm**;
- but in fact Jehovah is the true God of storms, using one in this case to destroy Baal’s followers, under the leadership of a man appropriately named “Lightning Bolt”(!) motivated by the “Honeybee”
- the Canaanite general, Sisera, fled from the battle scene and was later killed while fast asleep when a woman named Jael pounded a tent peg into his head
- the grisly story is told in...

Judg 4:21-22

²¹ Then Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went down into the ground; for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died. ²² And then, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said to him, "Come, I will show you the man whom you seek." And when he went into her *tent*, there lay Sisera, dead with the peg in his temple.

- we are *all* facing & fighting **spiritual battles**; the Bible makes it clear that we are in a constant battle – but it is not a fight against “flesh & blood”, it is a fight against spiritual powers, against especially the enemy of our souls
- one of the contemporary Christian songs says:
“When the power of darkness comes in like a flood,
the battle belongs to the Lord!”
- and this story reminds us again that *God will give the victory!*
 - He may use something as awesome as a big storm...or as seemingly insignificant as a tent peg
 - for certain, God wanted to teach His people (as He always does) that it is not chariots & troop numbers (big bank accounts & jazzy programs) that make the difference
...Sisera had mighty **iron** chariots but he was killed by a tiny piece of **iron** -- the tent peg, in the hand of a housewife!
- those who mock us for being Christians, or make life difficult for us because of our faith, or oppose us because we don’t fit in with the ways of the ungodly world around us, may seem

to have all the advantages, greater resources, stronger power, etc. – but they don't! “He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall scoff at them.” (Psa. 2:4–5)

-- God will give the victory! -- we are “more than overcomers through Him who loved us so”

This great victory is celebrated in the song recorded in Judges chapter 5 –

[G. DEBORAH'S SONG]

- we have already looked at many verses in this song so we won't review it all here
- this is one of the finest examples of a **song of triumph** in Hebrew literature; a very ancient one (written & sung 1200 yrs. before Christ)
- it is also one of Israel's most formidable and earliest articulations of its **faith in Jehovah** God
- this song, probably written by Deborah and accompanied on a musical instrument by Barak (Levites were trained musicians), praises **Jehovah** for His great victory on behalf of Israel, and at the same time ridicules **Baalism** as being a weak substitute for the worship of the true God
 - as “a mother in Israel” Deborah is concerned to teach the ‘children’ about the dangers and uselessness of following the Canaanite religion; and one of the best methods of teaching is putting truth into the form of songs
- in doing so she emphasizes the **value of ‘songs’**
 - Andrew Fletcher long ago, in Scotland, said:
“Let me write the **songs** of a nation, I don't care then who writes the **laws**.”
- songs are very important in the life of any nation –
 - they are one of the best means of **preserving the values** of a society and **guarding a culture** because people listen to songs over & over, they memorize them, and the songs affect their emotions & their thinking
 - songs are very powerful vehicles for **value transference** and **shaping attitudes**
- ...so here's a **caution**: what songs fill our hearts & our minds? What songs are our children & grandchildren listening to?
- note how this musical addition to the story of the battle highlights the **priority of PRAISE** in the life of a believer (the song composed/sung “on that day” as vs. 1 tells us!)
 - you may remember that Moses & Miriam sang another famous song right after God delivered Israel from Egypt thru Red Sea
 - also recall that the first thing Joshua did on entering the Promised Land was erect a stone monument to praise & acknowledge God's goodness
 - and David, Israel's greatest song-writer, expressed it this way:
Ps 40:1-3
I waited patiently for the Lord;
he turned to me and heard my cry.
² He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.
³ He put a **new song** in my mouth,
a **hymn of praise** to our God.
Many will see and fear
and put their trust in the Lord.

- Walter Brueggemann draws attention to Judges 5:10 & 11:

Judg 5:10-11

¹⁰ Let all Israel, rich and poor,
Join in his praises-
Those who ride on white donkeys
And sit on rich carpets,
And those who are poor and must walk.

¹¹ The village musicians
Gather at the village well
To sing of the triumphs of the Lord.
Again and again they sing the ballad
Of how the Lord saved Israel
With an army of peasants!

- Israel is urged to repeat the “triumphs of the Lord”, when riding, when sitting, when walking – all the time! And to tell the story “at the village well” where people gather to exchange news. “Everywhere and always, everyone in Israel is invited to tell and retell the triumphs of the Lord”

- and as God’s New Testament people, we too are urged to “be witnesses” to the triumphs of the Lord in our lives, to “gossip the Gospel” at the water-coolers & coffee counters of our lives ...this entire story in Judges is not just about teamwork, or leadership, or motivation, or the priority of praise...important as these are

- it is about the **reality of spiritual warfare**, pointing us on to that Greater Barak, born of a mother in Israel, who comes to Galilee of the Gentiles as God’s great Light to those who walk in darkness; and as God’s great Lightning Bolt who has defeated the enemy of our souls and who will some day be victorious in that final great battle of history which will be fought in the very same valley where Deborah & Barak met Sisera: the valley of Megiddo

I think Martin Luther summed this up best in his famous hymn, A Mighty Fortress (if I can be permitted to reverse the order of his verses)–

“And tho this world with devils filled, Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph thru us.
The prince of darkness grim, We tremble not for him– His rage we can endure,
For lo, his doom is sure: One little word shall fell him.
“Did we in our own strength confide, Our striving would be losing,
Were not the right man on our side, The man of God’s own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He– Lord Sabaoth His name,
From age to age the same, *And He must win the battle.*”