

Judges: Debra

Revival

By Tom Hill

Bible Text: Judges 4:1—5:31

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During these last few weeks we have studied the book of Judges. It gives to us a record of judges who judged Israel centuries ago, just after they came into the Promised Land. God brought them into the Promised Land after many years of slavery in Egypt. He promised them the land and he told them he would give it to them. Unfortunately and sadly the book of Judges records for us those times when they rebelled against God and the judgment that God brought against them because of their unbelief and disobedience.

We have examined some unusual judges thus far. Our first Judge, Othniel we would perhaps have expected him to serve as a Judge, because he was a war veteran, a war hero. He has captured enemy lands during his youth and God used him to once again defeat the enemy and bring peace to Israel. And then we examined Ehud the left handed warrior who by deception and cleverness was able to destroy the evil king who had subjugated the children of Israel. And then we looked at Shamgar, a real unknown, only two mentions of his name in all of Scripture. We think a farmer because he used the implement of farmers, an ox goad as the means by which he destroyed 600 Philistines and brought peace and rest to Israel.

Today we examine yet a different kind of judge. This time a woman, a woman by the name of Deborah. I printed out for you the record in Scripture of her exploits. On one side, page number one, we have the references from Judges chapter four. On the reverse side, page number two, we have Judges chapter five. We won't take the time today to read these. It would take considerable amount of time to read them. I will just kind of point to sections of the verses as we go through our study so that you can glance at them and see how they refer to this woman judge, one of the real famous icons, if you will, of the children of Israel, a woman judge.

Right at the beginning we find a description of the conditions of Israel at the time of Deborah. It says that they did evil again, a cycle of sin repeated over and over again by the children of Israel. We read in chapter two of judges at the beginning of our study how God said this would happen. God predicted and said, "During the next years you will have judges who will reform you and bring you back to me. But then when the died the rest and the peace that they brought, you will leave, you will abandon it and you will

go right back into your sinful ways again and each time successfully worse than the previous time.”

We find stated here it says:

“Israel again did what was evil.”¹

The evil that Israel repeated over and over again began with infidelity, doubt, unbelief. They refused to believe God. God had told them, “When you come into the land I will be with you. If you will trust me and obey me, I will grant you victory over the enemies and the nations that inhabit the land and I will give it to you.”

They began well under Joshua. But when Joshua died they quickly turned to sinful ways. Here we find the pattern repeated starting with infidelity, unbelief, going then progressively worse into iniquity after iniquity, sin after sin. It says they did it again which means they continued, they added sin to their sin going progressively worse in their behavior and rebellion.

And it says that the Lord sold them. God had warned them. He said, “If you turn against me, I will become your enemy. Instead of fighting on your behalf and defending you and granting you victory against your enemies, I will go and I will empower your enemies to defeat you and to oppress you as part of the judgment upon you for your sin. And it describes it here as God selling them. It is a term used in the slave trade. That is like a slave master selling one of his slaves to another. It describes handing them over to his ... to their enemies. God handed them over to the Canaanites. Jabin the king oppressed them.

And we read the description of the oppression that this king brought upon them in verse number there. It is just very short. It says that he oppressed them cruelly. The description there means that he brought psychological and physiological pressure upon them with one purpose in mind, to destroy them. He wanted to destroy the children of Israel and wipe them out as a nation. It was a pressure and a crushing of them and a suppressing of them, designed to make them cry. Did it for 20 years. He oppressed them.

Then we read they cried. Not the tears from their suffering, although they certainly did cry because of their suffering and oppression. But this time they turned to God and they cried out to God for relief from their suffering and from the oppression that the enemies brought upon them. They cried out to the Lord for relief and for help.

God brought help to them in a strange fashion. He raised up a woman, Deborah by name. Deborah lived in the southern part of Israel, down near Jerusalem and she judged Israel. we don't know how long prior to this, but she served as a judge in Israel prior to this occasion when God began to elevate her to lead Israel to victory. She was prophetess. She made prophecies and she called upon a man from the northern part of Israel, a man by the name Barak and said, “Barak, I want to talk with you.”

¹ Judges 4:1.

Barak came down to where Deborah prophesied and judged down in Bethel and he came down and she confronted him and said, "Now, Barak, you know that God has spoken to you and he has informed you to gather the troops together at a mountain, Mount Tabor, I believe, is the name of the mountain. Gather the troops together there and God will grant you victory over the Canaanites."

Now we can't see that it is stated in Scripture, but kind of the implication was: Why is taking you so long? Why have you not done this? God has spoken to you. Where are the troops? How come you haven't gathered them together in obedience to God's Word? And Deborah kind of called him on his timidity or his unbelief and said, "You go get those troops and you go to Mount Tabor and you defeat the Canaanites as God said."

And we see the degree of fear, perhaps. And Barak he said, "If you don't go with me, Deborah, I am not going. You must go with me. If you will go with me, I will go. And we will fight."

And Deborah says, "I will go, but on one condition. You will not get the glory for this victory. A woman will get the glory for this victory. Let's go."

They went up to Mount Tabor. They gathered together 10,000 troops to form an army to attack the Canaanites. They attacked the Canaanites at a river. It is called River Kishon. Not a big river, but a river in the northwest part of Israel. This particular river had, on occasion, would reach flood stage because it was at the base of a mountain, Mount Tabor. And there was a kind of a swampy area there. And when the storms would come it would flood on its way out to the Mediterranean Sea. God said, "That is where I want you to fight the Canaanites is down in that valley at the river."

We don't read it in this chapter, but in chapter five, which records Deborah and Barak's celebration of the victory we read part of what brought the victory, a thunderstorm. God sent a thunderstorm that created the flood of the river down in the valley that swamped the chariots and swamped the army of the Canaanites. And we read here in Judges four we read of the victory, verses 12 through verse 16. It says that Barak led the troops in victory, completely destroying the armies of the Canaanites. Some of the expositors that I read described the army of the Canaanites upwards of 40,000 men, but 10,000 Israelites defeated them because God was with them.

One of their group escaped, the captain, Sisera, the captain of the Canaanites troops, he escaped. So much for bravery in battle, huh, by your faithful leader. He escaped and he fled away heading north away from the battle scene. Barak chased after him. Sisera had a bit of a head start and he got ahead of him and he came across the tent of a woman by the name of Jael. Jael was the wife of a man named Heber. Heber was a friend of the king Jabin of the Canaanites.

So Sisera comes and he sees Jael. He recognizes her and says, "Can I come in and hide? I need rescuing from the enemy."

Jael says, "Come on in. You will be safe here." She gave him some milk, gave him a blanket to cover him to protect him and he fell asleep because of his exhaustion not only from the battle, but from his escape.

Jael recognized Sisera as an enemy of the Israelites and she took a tent peg. A tent peg is maybe six to eight inches in length, perhaps longer, and while he slept she crept up upon him and placed the tent spike against his temple as he lay on his side and drove it through his head with a hammer and drove the spike through his head so securely it went right into the ground on the other side of his head.

Shortly thereafter Barak arrived on the scene. Jael went out and said, "I think the one you pursue is in here." Barak went in and sure enough there was Sisera fastened securely to the ground in the tent with a tent peg through his skull.

When Deborah in her celebration in chapter five described the scene she described it as destroying his skull, smashing it against the ground.

Barak then pursued Jabin and the remainder of the Canaanites and destroyed them. And we read at the end of the chapter of chapter 24 that they completely destroyed the Canaanites and all of that territory just as God had said to Barak prior to Deborah's calling him then subsequently to Deborah's encouraging him with the Word of God to him and then when they arrived at the battle scene on Mount Tabor calling him to battle, Barak was still a little bit timid and Deborah had to kind of prod him a little bit. Go out there. Go after them. Go destroy them. And he led the Israelites in victory over the Canaanites.

And then we read on the verse side of the page on chapter two recorded there from Judges chapter five the celebration of Deborah and Barak, of the victory over the Canaanites. We won't read the whole thing. I will just pick out a few highlights of that celebration time. First she starts with a little bit of history. And she reminds the children of Israel of the times when God had intervened on behalf of the children of Israel and she names specific times that they knew in their history. And then she included some recent ones. She included Shamgar and she included Jael, the most recent one. There is the victory and the honor and the glory going to a woman that brought about the victory over the Canaanites. And then she recounted the victory and she talked about the men who joined from the company of all of the Israelites, there were only two nations, two tribes that provided men to go and fight. The others, when called upon, refused to come. No, we are not going to come and help you. Even though they had promised and made promise at the beginning when they came into the Promised Land. We will all fight together.

When this occasion arrived they refused to come. And she denounces them and she points them out and she says, "You didn't come. You didn't come. You didn't come. You refused to help us." And the honor goes to those did, who fought valiantly and willingly to secure rest and peace for Israel.

And then she included a very interesting part. She kind of surmises what Sisera's mother might have done looking for her son to come home from battle. He didn't come and he didn't come and he didn't come. And so she spoke to his concubines, kind of a common practice in that day. Men not only had a wife, but maybe multiple wives and then in addition to that they had concubines who bore children for them. And she spoke to Sisera's concubines and they said, "Oh, don't worry about it. Don't worry about it. They are a victorious crew and, in fact, they are so victorious that there is two women for every man.

Now what does that tell you about the wickedness of that day of the Canaanites, describing how they would take women captive and how they would rape them and commit sexual immorality with them. That was part of the victory over the enemy. And here she is surmising this is what Sisera's mother would say, reminding them of the wickedness of the enemy that they had just destroyed. And then she closes her celebration with, oh, but thanks be to God who gave us the victory, who enabled us to defeat our enemy just as he promised. And then we read 40 years of peace followed, 40 year followed of rest and peace from their enemies.

Now why do you think God provided this record and preserved it for the people of Israel? Well, first we can examine and understand that God would want them to know the consequences of their infidelity. She has warned them many times. You will pay for it. Your unbelief has consequences always. And he wanted to warn them and to remind them of how their unbelief would bring consequences to them and not good consequences, evil, dire, oppressive consequences. Your infidelity will lead to iniquity. Your iniquity will lead to immorality and to idolatry and to your abandoning God. And it would come about that you would integrate with all of the nations in the land which I told you to destroy and they will lead you astray and I will become your enemy.

And this record gives us a vivid description of the reality of what God has warned them would happen. And God wanted his people to know that he meant what he said when he told them, "Your unbelief will result in judgment." And he brought judgment upon them and he became their adversary and he enabled their enemies to oppress them for many years, because of their sin.

This record also points out to us the character and nature of God. God is a sovereign God. God controls all things and we see here some interesting aspects of life that God controls. He controls foreign nations. He controls individuals, Jabin, Sisera, Jael, Barak, Deborah. He controls his people, the children of Israel. He gathered them together. He controls the weather. Yeah, God is in charge of the weather. We don't understand that at times, do we? But God controls all things. Everything goes through the palm of his hand, so to speak. He is a sovereign God. And he is in charge and he has a plan and a purpose which he will fulfill.

We see God as an omnipotent God. Not only does he control the weather, but he is able to enable his people to overcome the enemies that they face.

We also see God as the faithful God. He had made promises to Abraham their forefather and he had promised to them a land. He had promised to them a multitude of people would come through the loins of Abraham, a mighty nation. And during the time of their oppression under the hand of King Jabin of the Canaanites, it sure didn't look like it. They did not possess the land. They, in fact, served as slaves to a foreign nation, oppressed severely so, hardly fitting the description that God gave to Abraham of his promise.

Ah, but God is faithful to his promise. He promised that land to Israel and he promised them that they would experience victory over their enemies when they would trust him. And here we find a description of that true. When they cried out to God and said, "God, help us." God came down and helped them and was faithful to his promise. He gave them their land. They enjoyed it. They had rest and peace in their land that God had given to them. Forty years they did.

God keeps his Word and he wanted the Israelites not only to know of the covenant that he had made with Abraham, the covenant that {?} then and applied to them, but of his faithfulness to that covenant on their behalf. And then we see the wrath of God against sin. We don't like to think of that, do we? We like to think of God as a God of love, a nice God, a kindly, gentlemanly God kind of pictured up there just kind of patting people on the head and saying, "Nice job, nice try. You tried. That's ok."

No, my friends, that does not describe God. God is a God of wrath and he is a God of judgment. And when he says he will judge sin he means exactly what he says just as much as he is faithful to his promises of good, because he has promised to judge us for our sin. We deserve it, you know. The children of Israel deserved the judgment that they got at the hand of the Canaanites, because they rebelled against God. They abandoned him. They turned from him in unbelief and disobedience. And they deserved the judgment that they got every bit as much as the Canaanites deserved the judgment they got from God when he acted on behalf of the children of Israel. God is equal in the judgments against sin.

God wanted the children of Israel to know about his character. And then another reason why he would record it is because this... these events fit into God's plan and purpose of redemption.

Now you have to go back to the beginning to see how it fits in. When you go back to the beginning you see that God created everything without sin, perfect. He created Adam and Eve upright, righteous, holy, no presence of sin at all in their lives. And for some time they walked in that obedience to God. They served him without sin. Then one day when tempted by the serpent to disobey and to disregard God's command, they ate of the forbidden fruit in the garden in Eden. Sin entered their lives and destruction with it. Now they needed a Savior, because they now lived at odds with the God who created them. They had fellowshiped with him. They had walked with him. They had enjoyed his presence. Now they no longer enjoyed that presence because of their sin. Their minds

now kept them from understanding God's word and they did not even want to fellowship with him anymore.

When God called to them in the garden, "Adam, Adam, where are you?" How did they respond? They ran and hid. They didn't want to see God. They needed a Savior now. They needed someone that would bridge the gap, someone who would reconcile them back to God. And God promised them a Savior. God promised them, "I will send the seed of the woman who will come and crush the head of the serpent," the very first indication that God would provide a Savior. He didn't need to do that, you know. He could have just left Adam and Eve progress and die without a Savior, because nowhere in his instructions to Adam and Eve did he ever indicate that he would provide such a Savior if they sinned, only the judgment that would come upon them when they sinned and they got it.

As we read through Scripture, God progressively reveals his plan of redemption and that first promise how it would come to fulfillment, one of the first indications was he chose Abraham and said, "Through Abraham I will provide the Savior, the one that I promised to Adam and Eve in the garden. He will come through the line of Abraham."

This story, this record gives to us a story of salvation, a story of redemption, a mini picture, if you will, of God's plan and purpose, because it describes man in their sinful condition in bondage to sin, rebelling against God, rejecting him, their needing a Savior to release them and to bring them relief from their bondage and from their sin.

God provided a Savior. God provided for them Deborah and Barak to lead them in victory, just human saviors, but, nonetheless, a picture of God's plan of redemption.

We also see the frailty of human saviors, because Deborah and Barak died. And they only had peace as long as Barak and Deborah lived. When they died they went right back into the same old bondage again. We will read about that at a future time. But the cycle repeated itself. They could not bring long lasting relief and release from the bondage of sin, temporary, not permanent.

As a mini picture it shows us God's purposes in redemption. Ultimately we find relief revealed in Scripture the Savior, the one that God has promised all through the centuries past fulfilled in one man Jesus, the Savior, not a savior, not a kind of savior, not a picture of a savior, not one to emulate and copy and imitate, the Savior, the one who came and destroyed sin in its totality so that he could bring ultimate, final, eternal relief from the bondage of sin to all who would believe him. Jesus himself said that. He said the Father has sent me. And he has sent me and all who believe in me shall have everlasting life. And those who don't believe and trust in me, they will stand condemned. Made it very simple, made it very clear. He fulfilled all of the promises in pictures like this one as well as prophecies and predictions identifying and describing the Savior. Jesus fulfilled every one of them in absolute detail.

God wanted the children of Israel to know his plan of redemption and how these events fit into his plan. And he provided and preserved a record for them.

Now you no doubt have the temptation to say, “Well, what has that got to do with me? That happened centuries ago. How does that apply to me today?”

Well, let me take just a few moments and show you how it fits you and me today. It fits you and me today because it points out to us our need of a Savior, because the conditions that existed in the time of Deborah and Barak and Sisera and Jabin exist today. We are lost and bound in our sin by ourselves without Christ just like they were in bondage to the Canaanites. We are in bondage to sin.

You say, “I am not in bondage to anybody... {?”

Well, don't get too picky here, now, huh? Yeah, we do. We all sin. And do you keep repeating the same ones over and over again just like the children of Israel caught in the cycle and bondage of sin? We need a Savior just like they needed a savior to relieve them from the bondage of their enemies. We need a Savior to relieve us from the bondage and cycle of sin.

Jesus is that Savior. Jesus is the one who promised that everyone who comes to him he will not cast out, he will accept. And the Scriptures tell us that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. So just like they cried out to God for relief, every one of us who cries out to God for relief through Jesus gets relief. He gives them relief.

So then we have a Savior who saves us from our sin and from the power of sin and from the practice of sin in our daily lives. We have a Savior. And that Savior not only works on our behalf to save us from sin, but that Savior works in our lives on an every day basis to grant us on a daily practice relief from sin, victory over sin. We may have a temporary time when we disobey, but he brings us back. He brings us back. And he grants us peace. And this peace doesn't last just for a short time, but it lasts for the lifetime of the judge. Do you know how long that lifetime is? That is an eternal lifetime. As long as this Judge lives, the Lord Jesus, this Savior, this Redeemer, as long as he lives we have redemption and reconciliation back with God. That is an eternal one, without end, no end to it.

Another way it applies to us is that it applies to what we call the Church, the people of God in our day. The children of Israel God identified as his chosen people in that day. In our day the Church describes and embodies God's chosen people today. And it describes for us our need collectively as believers in Christ. Those of us that have trusted in and called upon Christ we have become members of the body of Christ, the Church of God. We are parts of it. We gather together here on the first day of the week as one of many groups of people throughout all the earth who gather, who comprise in totality the Church of Christ.

Well, sadly, the Church of Christ has begun to fall onto the pattern of the people of Israel that we read a few moments ago. We have begun to doubt God, to question him. And that unbelief has begun to sire in us iniquity and sin so that many people today describe the conditions within the professing Church of Jesus Christ to be very similar to that of the world. And, in fact, there are many church leaders today who have deliberately attempted to make the church just like the world in a misguided and false attempt to win the world.

Peter warned of a time like this when he said, "It is time for judgment to begin at the house of God." And God has begun to judge the Church because of our unbelief. And this message that we read described for us in Judges four and five applies not only to us as individuals, but collectively as a Church of Jesus Christ as well. We must cry out to God and repent and turn from our sin collectively as a Church, as a body of Christ that we might begin to experience, once again, his presence among us invigorating us, enlivening us.

Well, what need has the Spirit of God opened your eyes to see in your life today? Oh, I pray he has opened your eyes to see you need a Savior. And you need a Savior not only once, but you need a Savior always. You need a Savior every day. You need a Savior constantly who will work in your life, who will not only save you at the beginning from your sins, but then on a day to day basis grant you freedom and victory over the practice and power of sin that you might enjoy his peace and rest in this life now.

How will you respond to what the Spirit of God has opened your eyes to see? Oh, I pray that you don't reject him. I pray that you don't put it off to another day. I pray that today you will call upon him in faith and trust and obedience and cry out to him even as the children of Israel did, "Lord, help me. Lord, save me. Lord, empower me today to walk in victory over sin in my life today."

Well, what changes do these require? It will require some changes in your lives. I pray that the Spirit of God will open your eyes to see what changes you need to make in order to conform your life to the truth. And when you conform your life to the truth in faith and obedience upon God, you will experience the freedom and joy and peace that he has promised.

I pray that you will. Call upon him today.

Let's close in prayer.