**Deborah and Barak—The Uniform Lesson for June 4, 2017**

Devotional Reading:Hebrews 11:29-40

 Background Scripture:Judges 4, 5

 1 And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, when Ehud was dead.

 2 And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles.

 3 And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.

4 And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.

 5 And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

 6 And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedeshnaphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?

7 And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand.

 8 And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go.

 9 And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh.

10 And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him.

Key Verse

 [Deborah] said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh. —Judges 4:9

**By Dr. Mark Scott**

The book of Judges is one of the darker books of the Bible. It covers a time frame from 1370 to 1040 BC. God called several leaders to help Israel during those dark days, but none of them achieved the status that Joshua or Samuel enjoyed (the leaders who bookend this period).

We associate judges with courtrooms. The judges in the book of Judges did fulfill that role by holding court and rendering decisions (Judges 4:5). But the judges also functioned as prophets (v. 4), military leaders (vv. 6, 7), and saviors (3:31). Our text highlights the call of a strong woman named Deborah and a weak-kneed man named Barak.

**Sin Makes You Pay & Pray**

***Judges 4:1-3***

There are two refrains in Judges. One is, “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6; 19:1a; 21:25). Another is in our text. *Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord*. Judges traces the ugly cycle of God’s people falling into sin, God allowing them to be punished, the people repenting of their sin, and God rescuing them out of their bondage. This cycle is traced in Judges 2:11-23.

Deborah and Barak are the fourth and fifth judges of the twelve judges mentioned in the Book. They are forced to come to the rescue because God’s people have failed once again. Ehud, the southpaw who stabbed fat King Eglon (Judges 3:12-30), had died. Evidently Shamgar’s judgeship was short-lived (3:31). God punished Israel by allowing Jabin, king of Canaan, and Jabin’s commander Sisera to overrun Israel. This all happened in northern Israel (while Deborah judged Israel farther south). The military might of Sisera was underlined by having *nine hundred chariots fitted with iron*. This detail is mentioned because in the ancient world the main war machine was soldiers. Whoever had more soldiers almost routinely won the war. Israel was *cruelly oppressed* (crushed, squeezed, or pressed) *for twenty years*. So Israel *cried* to the Lord. Sin makes you pay and pray.

**Courage Makes You Act**

***Judges 4:4-7***

Deborah is one of the classiest women in the Bible. She was a strong leader (judge, avenger, defender, governor), even though in her humility, her self-perception was that of a simple mother of Israel (Judges 5:7). She is identified as a *prophet* (technically the feminine “prophetess,” as in the *English Standard Version*). The Hebrew word means “to bubble forth and speak enthusiastically as if speaking by divine inspiration.” Her husband was named *Lappidoth*. She presided in court in *Ephraim* (farther south toward Jerusalem) at a certain palm tree that bore her name. Here she settled *disputes*. This word is a common one in Hebrew (*mishpat*). It meant to make judgments, set things right, render sentences, and decide a case. Think a kinder, gentler Judge Judy.

She evidently was troubled by Israel’s oppression by Jabin, so one day while court was in recess, and in obedience to a revelation from God (*The Lord . . . commands you*), she sent word to Barak, whose name means lightning, to muster the troops from two of the northern tribes (Naphtali and Zebulun) and take *ten thousand men* to Mount Tabor. (This is the traditional site of the transfiguration of Jesus.) God would lead Sisera’s chariots and troops to the Kishon River so that Barak could capture them. Mountains always provided a position of strength for armies. Whoever controlled the mountain often controlled the battle. Deborah’s courage to speak God’s words and to stand by Barak’s side in battle was remarkable.

**Honor Gets Deferred**

***Judges 4:8-10***

Was Barak a chicken? *If you go with me, I will go. But if you don’t go with me, I won’t go*. Barak might have wanted Deborah to go because God was speaking through her. He is, after all, listed in the hall of faith (Hebrews 11:32). But verse 9 makes one wonder about his courage, or lack thereof. *For the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman*. Why does Deborah underline this femininity?

In the ancient Near East war honor (glory, rank, renown) would more typically go to a man. Deborah’s humility is evident in her remark. But the honor that should have been Barak’s was deferred to and deserved by Deborah. And Sisera was ultimately nailed (in two senses of the word) by another woman, Jael (Judges 4:17-22). Deborah stepped up to the plate, Sisera’s army was defeated, and Jabin’s oppression over Israel was brought to an abrupt halt (vv. 23, 24). Deborah (whose name means “bee”) put the sting on the people of Canaan.

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