

LESSONS 6: The Song of Deborah

JUDGES 5

THE BATTLE **Read Judges 4:10-23.**

1. Battle details (these are going to change when we read the song of Deborah, so take note):
 - What tribes did Barak call?
 - How many men went up to Mount Tabor with him?
 - Sisera get a report of Barak's movements and gathers his army (v12-13)
Who deploys Sisera?
 - What is the outcome?

THE KENITES

2. Look up the following names in the BlueLetterBible concordance. What do the names mean and how do the meanings add to the narrative picture? (Follow them through to their root verbs.)
 - a. **Heber:**
 - b. **Kenite:**
 - c. **Jael:**
3. The place name, **Zaanaim**, means "removings" or a place of "taking down" as in a tent being taken down and moving forward. Who/what is being taken down in this place of "removings"?

The choices we make when events break suddenly on us reflect our heart and the training of our minds. Compare Sisera's and Jael's choices:

4. **Sisera's choices** (as a trained military man): Why does Sisera seek refuge at the Kenite camp instead of Hazor with King Jabin, and why does Jael's tent seem a good choice?
5. **Jael's choices:** What might a woman's first reaction be to the sight of a desperate and dangerous military commander standing outside her tent?
6. Why choose a tent peg and hammer as a weapon?

Questions for Reflection:

We talked about the seven stumbling block in oppression from Isaiah. One had to do with having the right values and perspective of the kingdom you are pursuing. Sisera illustrates the "Canaanite" for us.

- Where are Sisera's values, and what is his perspective of the kingdom?
- What is the danger of sourcing your identity, comfort, and hope in earthly kingdoms, leaders, and material things?
- What happens when that identity collapses?

THE PICTURE:

Unknown to Barak, he has a comrade (Heber) whose family have come alongside him. They were transient people in his life, but they ended up here in the fight at just the right place and time to help Barak defeat a final enemy.

These Kenites are the “smiths” whom God brings into this battle to strike a particular blow against Israel’s enemy. Jael (the one who is profitable) is the one who wields the hammer and is given the honor of striking that musical note that becomes the death song over Israel’s enemies. Indeed, she is exalted in song – the Song of Deborah.

The Song of Deborah JUDGES 5

General observations about the song:

- **It is written in archaic Hebrew.** Even Jewish scholars have had difficulty in translating it, which is why there is a great deal of variation in translations.
- **The song differs from the narrative.** It has some **additional information** not included in the narrative.
- **It is written in first person.** You are meant to identify with the speaker as if you are speaking.
- **It is poetic literature,** which means the text will incorporate figurative language such as metaphors, similes, hyperbole, personification, and symbolism.
- **The song is structured around three sets of comparisons.**
 - **Part 1 (Judges 5:2-11a)** compares a powerful God to a powerless people serving other gods. We see the condition of God’s people as they struggle with their oppressor. The section is bookended by a theme of people willingly offering themselves and a command to hear and speak (underlined). In v11, we are commanded to speak of the LORD’s works and not Israel’s. The battle belonged to the LORD.
 - **Part 2 (Judges 5:11b-23)** compares battle details: Israel’s warriors to the Canaanite kings. The narrative moves us through the battle sequence with “then” statements:
 - (v11-12) Calling of Deborah/Barak
 - (v13-18) Calling of Israel
 - (v19-22) The battle with the kings
 - (v22) The retreat

The battle/retreat segments are bookended by the phrase “the LORD against the mighty” which indicates the battle is really the LORD’s, not Israel’s. The LORD is the deliverer. Part 2 focuses on the assessment of the participants. It ends in v23 with a curse by the Angel of the LORD against those who did not participate.

- **Part 3 (Judges 5:24-31)** compares two women: Jael and Sisera’s mother. From the curse in v23, the narrative segues immediately to a blessing. The song ends with an exhortation that everyone who loves the LORD should shine as the sun at full strength.

PART 1 (Judges 5:2-11) Comparison of God in His power to a people ruled by idols

7. Describe the feeling you get from this picture of God's power in verses 4-5.
8. What does life become when Israel chooses other gods? (v6-8)
9. Why mention Shamgar and Jael? Why pair Shamgar and Jael as examples?
10. Look up the word for highway (**orach**) in verse 6.
 - What does it mean literally?
 - What does it mean figuratively?
11. Even though the people moved to the fortified cities, were they able to protect themselves?

Far from the noise of the archers (v11): The noise of "*chatsim*" (those who divide)—archers who march in divisions, or maybe shepherds dividing flocks at watering places—both are very noisy, and yet here, a distant echo. Jewish translations interpret this: The praise of God's righteous acts will be so loud that the noise of the *chatsim* will sound like a distant echo.

Questions for Reflection:

- We think we can make peace for ourselves by finding ways to cope and avoid conflict, but there is no peace in avoiding conflict. Why?
 - Does withdrawal into "safe spaces" or fortifications fulfill our mandate to go out into the world?
- God's people deserted the *orach* – the highway or way of life – and took byways in pursuit of the Baals and Ashtoreth. The byways led them from idolatry to oppression to fear . . . from fear to despair and powerlessness . . . from powerlessness to either bursting out in violence or withdrawing into silence (a resurgence of their Canaanite side). Israel took the path of withdrawal into silence for 20 years.
- When you look at your life or the current events in our world, do you feel yourself on this path somewhere? If so, where have you stumbled?

PART 2 (Judges 5:12-23) Comparison of Israel vs. the Canaanite kings

"Then the people of the LORD shall go down to the gates." (v11b, NKJV) "Then" marks the rise of Deborah and Barak.

"Then the survivors came down, the people against the nobles; The LORD came down for me against the mighty." (v13)

12. Knowing what we know of the battle, who are the survivors or remnant (*sariyd*) in the song?

The Calling of Israel (v14-18)

13. Who participated?
14. Who did not participate and why?

Battling the Canaanites

15. Where does the battle take place (Is this an earthly or heavenly battle)?
16. The word for "courses" in Judges 5:20 is *mecillah*.
 - a. What is the *mecillah* literally? (by definition, and in **2 Chronicles 9:11**)
 - b. Of what is the *mecillah* figurative in the following verses:

Judges 5:20:

Isaiah 40:3 and 62:10:

17. Who is Meroz (v23)?
18. Compare the details of the battle in this section to the narrative in chapter 4. How does the focus change?

Questions for Reflection:

The Song of Deborah emphasizes the theme of helping one another in battling oppression. Deborah does it for Barak. Heber and Jael play their parts. Deborah and the Angel of the LORD rebuke those who don't help.

- How do we respond to this command to help those battling in the "highway"?
- How can we fall into Reuben's model?
- How does Meroz describe us? **Read Matt 25:31-46; James 2:14-17.**

PART 3 (Judges 5:24-30) Comparison of Jael vs. Sisera's Mother

19. Compare Jael and Sisera's mother. What do we know about each?
20. After the oppression, how many years does the land have rest?

Questions for Reflection:

If you aren't struggling, that doesn't mean you shouldn't be in the battle.

- How are Deborah and Jael are models for us in dealing with believers like Barak?
- How do you motivate a Barak to deal with the oppressor?
- What weapons or tools do we need to be effective in helping a person deal with oppression?

Structure of the Song of Deborah Judges 5

Judges 5		Narrative
	Jdg 5:1	Opening verse
Part 1	Jdg 5:2	"When leaders lead in Israel, when the <u>people willingly offer themselves, Bless the LORD!</u> " (NKJV) (<i>opening theme</i>)
	Jdg 5:3	" <u>Hear</u> , O kings! . . ." (<i>a command</i>)
	Jdg 5:4-5	Picture of the LORD in His power and sovereignty
	Jdg 5:6-8	Picture of powerless Israel
	Jdg 5:9	"My heart is with the rulers of Israel who <u>offered themselves willingly with the people. Bless the LORD!</u> " (<i>closing theme</i>)
	Jdg 5:10-11a	" <u>Speak</u> , you who ride on white donkeys . . ." (<i>a command</i>)
Part 2	Jdg 5:11b-12	". . . Then the people of the LORD shall go down to the gates." Calling of Deborah and Barak
	Jdg 5:13-18	" Then the survivors came down . . . <u>The LORD</u> came down for me <u>against the mighty.</u> " Calling of Israel (who participated and who didn't)
	Jdg 5:19-22	" Then the kings of Canaan fought . . ." Battle details
	Jdg 5:22	" Then the horses' hooves pounded . . ." Retreat
	Jdg 5:23	Curse of Meroz by Angel of the LORD (like judgment of Bochim) ". . . Because they did not come to the help of the LORD, to the help of <u>the LORD against the mighty.</u> "
Part 3	Jdg 5:24	The blessing on Jael
	Jdg 5:24-27	Jael's account
	Jdg 5:28-30	Sisera's mother's perspective
	Jdg 5:31	Closing statement