

3:1 Now these are the nations which the LORD left, that He might test Israel by them, that is, all who had not known any of the wars in Canaan

2 (this was only so that the generations of the children of Israel might be taught to know war, at least those who had not formerly known it),

3 namely, five lords of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites who dwelt in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal Hermon to the entrance of Hamath.

4 And they were left, that He might test Israel by them, to know whether they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.

Taught cycle of sin in last week / here is another reason God allowed the Canaanites to persist in the land...

1 • test the AUTHENTICITY of their love for Him

2 • a test to IMPROVE the QUALITY of their faith / put it under STRESS to make it STRONGER

Vs. 2 says, “to teach them war” / = GOOD for them to battle the enemy. forefathers learned to trust God in battle / They needed to keep skills sharp

same way: Don’t get apathetic / Keep active in battle for the Gospel

5 Thus the children of Israel dwelt among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

6 And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons; and they served their gods.

7 So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs.

Notice the sexual sin / not just marrying these foreign women, but vs. 7 = it began with Baal and Asherah worship / Ritual prostitution / Israelite men pursuing Canaanite women / marry them / serve their gods / Vs. 7 “did what is evil” = throughout the OT = CHILD SACRIFICE

8 Therefore the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the children of Israel served Cushan-Rishathaim eight years.

“SOLD”? King of Mes. paid something to God? No = figure of speech

Israel SOLD THEMSELVES by their sin / “turned them over” to the enemy / enjoyed a season of sin = then had to pay the price for it.

This is EXACTLY what sin does = we enjoying sin. But we don’t understand the DEBT we are getting into!

9 When the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the children of Israel, who delivered them: Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother.

10 The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel. He went out to war, and the LORD delivered Cushan-Rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed over Cushan-Rishathaim.

11 So the land had rest for forty years. Then Othniel the son of Kenaz died.

This is the FIRST JUDGE of Israel, after Joshua died. We aren’t given many details / story is remarkable short for a great deliverance / Esp. when it brought about 40 years of peace!

There are 2 key details about Othniel =

(1) His family / son of Caleb! / & earned Caleb’s daughter by his VALOR

In fact, his name means “Lion of God”

(2) He was EMPOWERED by the HOLY SPIRIT! (as all judges in this book!)

When the Holy Spirit came upon Othniel, not an emotional experience / or deep revelation / These are great – but we OFTEN MISS the KEY effect of the HOLY SPIRIT in the OT = ACTION! When the Holy Spirit comes upon judges, they DO STUFF / take a risk / fight the enemy/ tear down idols MOVE FORWARD.

Let's not describe ourselves as DEEPLY SPIRITUAL PEOPLE if we aren't moved to ACTION! These should go HAND IN HAND. We must MOVE in the Spirit!

12 And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD strengthened Eglon king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD.

Israel had 40 years of peace and leisure = result was apathy and sin.

Previously, the Holy Spirit strengthened Othniel against the enemy... Here, God is strengthening the ENEMY against ISRAEL because of her sin

The Christian life can go either way! We are either strengthened against sin, or else we allow to sin to be strengthened against us by our SPIRITUAL APATHY.

13 Then he gathered to himself the people of Ammon and Amalek, went and defeated Israel, and took possession of the City of Palms. [Which is JERICHO!]

Eglon the King of Moab allied himself with Ammon and Amalek / three nations gathered together to subdue Israel / Probably—as the Moabites were attacking Jericho, Ammon and Amalek – nomadic tribes – were harassing Israel on the outskirts / distracting from Eglon's attack

By the way: SIN INCREASES and MULTIPLIES against us. One minor sin & other sins are quick to jump into the fight

You allow a little temptation to grow / no big deal / then you realize there are two more armies lined up behind / you are being overrun!

14 So the children of Israel served Eglon king of Moab eighteen years.

15 But when the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for them: Ehud the son of Gera, the Benjamite, a left-handed man.

We'll talk about Ehud's left handedness in a moment. Let's focus on this next phrase for a moment...

By him the children of Israel sent tribute to Eglon king of Moab.

TRIBUTE = Moab was ruling Israel like the mob / shake down money / or “protection” money.

In vs 17, King Eglon = extremely FAT man. This illustrates Moab prospering off of Israel's sweat & blood! Like a big tick that keep getting fatter ...

Moab “ruling” Israel like blood sucking leeches. It took 18 years of oppression for Israel repent

You might be tolerating some sin—it is STEALING LIFE from you like an EGLON. You are making daily tribute payments to that sin, but getting nothing of REAL value back in return. Please don't wait 18 years! Get help now!

16 Now Ehud made himself a dagger (it was double-edged and a cubit in length) and fastened it under his clothes on his right thigh.

17 So he brought the tribute to Eglon king of Moab. (Now Eglon was a very fat man.)

Because left handed, sword on the opposite side than the typical soldier / short (one cubit) = strap it to his leg under his clothes / guards would not normally check
As left handed = couldn't serve in the military front line / disruption in the rank and order of battle.

God loves to use unlikely heroes to accomplish His work / & all the glory to God / all the judges were unlikely heroes / A weakness can be our greatest strength = turned over to God for His use.

18 And when he had finished presenting the tribute, he sent away the people who had carried the tribute.

19 But he himself turned back from the stone images that were at Gilgal, and said, "I have a secret message for you, O king."

He said, "Keep silence!" And all who attended him went out from him.

20 So Ehud came to him (now he was sitting upstairs in his cool private chamber). Then Ehud said, "I have a message from God for you." So he arose from his seat.

Picture of the politics & intrigue of Eglon's mobster culture. / any juicy insider information to extend his power, he was all ears.

Ehud had gained his trust earlier with the tribute =Eglon thought Ehud was a snitch or traitor, & trusted him / Ehud was a spy

Why the king stood up? (which would have been an effort for this enormous fat man) = the clue is in vs 19 / "Silence!" / Ehud was whispering, and the king was enticed to come closer

21 Then Ehud reached with his left hand, took the dagger from his right thigh, and thrust it into his belly.

22 Even the hilt went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the dagger out of his belly; and his entrails came out.

The sword so deep it disappeared into Eglon's belly—even the handle! / "Entrails" = euphemism for Hebrew = "REFUSE" / dung / not entrails—but what was IN his guts.

ILLUSTRATES Hebrews 4:12! For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

God's word is spiritually alive and it WORKS in us /ITS TRUTH penetrates deep / gets the JUNK of lies and filth out of our minds.

23 Then Ehud went out through the porch and shut the doors of the upper room behind him and locked them.

24 When he had gone out, Eglon's servants came to look, and to their surprise, the doors of the upper room were locked. So they said, "He is probably attending to his needs in the cool chamber."

25 So they waited till they were embarrassed, and still he had not opened the doors of the upper room.

"Attending to his needs" is another euphemism. Hebrew = "covering his feet" = going to the bathroom = nasty smell / attendants were reluctant to barge in / So they waited... and waited... and waited... "What the heck is he doing in there???"

Therefore they took the key and opened them. And there was their master, fallen dead on the floor.

26 But Ehud had escaped while they delayed, and passed beyond the stone images and escaped to Seirah.

They waited so long that Ehud was long way from there / But—he wasn't running to safety / running to raise an army...!

27 And it happened, when he arrived, that he blew the trumpet in the mountains of Ephraim, and the children

of Israel went down with him from the mountains; and he led them.

28 Then he said to them, "Follow me, for the LORD has delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand."

I love that Ehud immediately gives God the glory for the deliverance / He knows circumstances allowed him to assassinate Eglon. He knew it was God's doing

So they went down after him, seized the fords of the Jordan leading to Moab, and did not allow anyone to cross over.

29 And at that time they killed about ten thousand men of Moab, all stout men of valor; not a man escaped.

30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for eighty years.

Victory and REST for 80 years.

31 After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed six hundred men of the Philistines with an ox goad; and he also delivered Israel.

Not much of a weapon against Philistines / IRON weapons / great advantage on in battle / except, GOD EMPOWERED Shamgar & his stick. The Philistines had no hope...

Once again—God using the weak and unlikely folks to accomplish His great work / so that God gets the glory

Paul describes the GOSPEL in the same terms / WEAK and SEEMINGLY FOOLISH message... yet powerfully saved millions

4:1 When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD.

2 So the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth Hagoyim.

3 And the children of Israel cried out to the LORD; for Jabin had nine hundred chariots of iron, and for twenty years he had harshly oppressed the children of Israel.

The scene = powerful enemy king, & commanding general. Sisera weaponry is truly terrifying = 900 iron chariots

Israel didn't use many chariots in battle – not until the later Kings – and they didn't have iron / at a great technological disadvantage.

4 Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time.

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

I'm going to preach about Deborah on Sunday, so we'll keep moving...

6 Then she sent and called for Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, "Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded, 'Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun;

Mt. Tabor = north central area of Israel / south of the Sea of Galilee / Zebulun and Naphtali are the local tribes

7 and against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hand'?"

Deborah sends Barak & army to the top of a volcanic hill / semi-round mound

Enemy with his 900 iron chariots roaming down in the valley / but foolish to attack the Israelites up on the mountain / Barak = all the advantages. Sisera = certain defeat.

Barak is probably thinking: *“Good plan, Deborah. I like the way you think. We’ll stay up here in this stronghold and taunt Sisera to attack us, and we’ll overrun them up here on Mt. Tabor, as their chariots lose their speed and movement.”*

“You are clearly a prophetess, because you are speaking truth—and I like it. I can certainly go along with your word.”

8 And 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!”

On the surface, can’t fault Barak for this. Deborah is a Prophet and a Judge. Surely, Barak wants God’s guidance in his battle against Sisera...

9 So she said, “I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.” Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh.

And yet, Deborah gives Barak a rebuke. The final victory in this battle would be at the hand of a woman! Barak will redeem himself in this story soon, but for now, he has a black eye.

10 And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; he went up with ten thousand men under his command, and Deborah went up with him.

So, Deborah goes with Barak anyway, despite the rebuke. We’ll get back to this on Sunday...

11 Now Heber the Kenite, of the children of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, had separated himself from the Kenites and pitched his tent near the terebinth tree at Zaanaïm, which is beside Kedesh.

12 And they reported to Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor.

Apparently Sisera was squeezing the local popular for intel. These folks have a bigger role to play, though, as we’ll see by the end of the battle.

13 So Sisera gathered together all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people who were with him, from Harosheth Hagoyim to the River Kishon.

Sisera has command over a large group of Canaanites / all gather to fight Israel

Repeats AGAIN the 900 IRON CHARIOTS / this is a big deal = Sisera’s advantage / unstoppable force against ill-equipped foot soldiers

BTW – It is a basic rule of warfare that you want to fight on the land that you have chosen, not on the land that your enemy has chosen! Surely Barak wouldn’t be so foolish as to leave his mountain fortress to attack an enemy on his chosen battlefield.

14 Then Deborah said to Barak, “Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the LORD gone out before you?”

Deborah commands Barak to ATTACK?? / To leave his place of security and attack where the enemy has

the *full advantage*—Barak and his armies rush into what looks like CERTAIN DEFEAT

So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him.

He didn't say, "Umm – I'm not sure you are a prophet anymore, Deborah. Let's put this to a committee."
He knew God was speaking through her, & he responded!

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.

What—I feel like we missed something here. What happened in the battle? How did Barak win?

In the next chapter, Deborah writes a prophetic song that recounts battle / we'll see what God thinks about Barak and his armies = heroes of the faith / we'll jump ahead then get back here and finish the passage

CHAPTER FIVE...

5:1 Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying:

2 "When leaders lead in Israel, When the people willingly offer themselves, Bless the LORD!

3 "Hear, O kings! Give ear, O princes!, even I, will sing to the LORD; will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel.

the theme / people rising up to lead / & followers who offer themselves willingly

4 "LORD, when You went out from Seir, When You marched from the field of Edom, The earth trembled and the heavens poured, The clouds also poured water;

5 The mountains gushed before the LORD, This Sinai, before the LORD God of Israel.

Wait—is this a CLUE to the battle? Of course! See 19–21...

19 "The kings came and fought, Then the kings of Canaan fought In Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo; They took no spoils of silver.

20 They fought from the heavens; The stars from their courses fought against Sisera.

21 The torrent of Kishon swept them away, That ancient torrent, the torrent of Kishon. O my soul, march on in strength!

This is what happened = Deborah commanded Barak to take the armies from their safety of Mt. Tabor, and to head down into the valley of certain death.

At that moment, Barak's faith was FULLY TESTED and found true & all who obeyed and followed him, "willingly offering themselves."

But even as they head for the overwhelming iron chariots = begins to rain! Harder and harder. Soon = torrential downpour.

The Kishon overflows/ smooth plains turn to mud / chariots sink / suddenly 10,000 infantry soldiers are attacking 900 immobile chariots / more than a 10 to 1 advantage!

Lesson: faith looks at an impossible situation / where you think you face certain failure or defeat / and says, "nevertheless Lord, at your word, command me to step out of my security and come to you where I

think I will probably fail”

And we love to pick on Barak for being a wuss, yet, Barak was willing to give his life! He stepped out in faith when it mattered the most!

6 “In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, The highways were deserted, And the travelers walked along the byways.

7 Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel, Until I, Deborah, arose, Arose a mother in Israel.

8 They chose new gods; Then there was war in the gates; Not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel.

9 My heart is with the rulers of Israel Who offered themselves willingly with the people. Bless the LORD!

Deborah notes the great disadvantage Israel had against the enemy in technology and weaponry. They barely a spear or shield!

So—when they rush into battle, their FAITH IN GOD is on full display

So, Deborah praises their actions...

10 “Speak, you who ride on white donkeys, Who sit in judges’ attire, And who walk along the road.

11 Far from the noise of the archers, among the watering places, There they shall recount the righteous acts of the LORD, The righteous acts for His villagers in Israel; Then the people of the LORD shall go down to the gates.

12 “Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, sing a song! Arise, Barak, and lead your captives away, O son of Abinoam!

I love how Deborah’s and Barak’s gifts are both part of the victory...

Her prophetic gift – “singing her song” / and Barak’s gift in the physical battle

13 “Then the survivors came down, the people against the nobles; The LORD came down for me against the mighty.

The LORD was fighting for Israel / this was the only chance they had for victory

14 From Ephraim were those whose roots were in Amalek.

Meaning—they lived in the territory of the Amalekites

After you, Benjamin, with your peoples, From Machir rulers came down, And from Zebulun those who bear the recruiter’s staff.

15 And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; As Issachar, so was Barak; Sent into the valley under his command;

Deborah notes those who followed Barak into battle...

Among the divisions of Reuben There were great resolves of heart.

Or “searchings of heart” / meaning – giving ear to the fear in their hearts

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? Asher continued at the seashore, And stayed by his inlets.

Deborah criticizes those who stayed safely in their various lands.

18 Zebulun is a people who jeopardized their lives to the point of death, Naphtali also, on the heights of the battlefield.

best descriptions of their faith = “jeopardizing their lives” = some translations = “despising their lives” even to death / doesn’t mean “I hate my life” but “I’m willing to lose my life for others” / LIKE JESUS! That is why Deborah praises them so richly!

BACK TO CHAPTER 4

4:17 However, Sisera had fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; for there was peace between Jabin king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.

18 And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, “Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; do not fear.” And when he had turned aside with her into the tent, she covered him with a blanket.

19 Then he said to her, “Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.” So she opened a jug of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him.

20 And he said to her, “Stand at the door of the tent, and if any man comes and inquires of you, and says, ‘Is there any man here?’ you shall say, ‘No.’ ”

same family Sisera pressed for intel earlier / Jael gained his trust, & helped hide him from his pursuers / He asks her for some food—which we’ll see makes him drowsy / And he asks for her to cover him and cover FOR him if anyone comes asking

This level of trust seems unusual—but in that part of the world, HOSPITALITY, even to one’s enemies, is a CULTURAL VIRTUE

Vs 22 says, Sisera falls fast asleep... but He has made a fatal mistake...

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.

23 So on that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan in the presence of the children of Israel.

I love how Jael had to use the simply, ordinary, common thing close at hand

What was her weapon against the enemy? A tent peg and hammer.

But because God was at work setting up the circumstances, her simple weapon was all that she needed.

24 And the hand of the children of Israel grew stronger and stronger against Jabin king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

BACK TO CHAPTER 5 TO FINISH DEBORAH’S SONG...

22 Then the horses’ hooves pounded, The galloping, galloping of his steeds.

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.’

Scholars don’t know where Meroz was, and this is the only time they are mentioned in scripture / why were they lost to history? = Because they were cursed for failing to fight against the enemy! Like the FIG TREE Jesus cursed / shriveled up and died

24 *“Most blessed among women is Jael, The wife of Heber the Kenite; Blessed is she among women in tents.*
25 *He asked for water, she gave milk; She brought out cream in a lordly bowl.*
26 *She stretched her hand to the tent peg, Her right hand to the workmen’s hammer; She pounded Sisera, she*
pierced his head, She split and struck through his temple.
27 *At her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still; At her feet he sank, he fell; Where he sank, there he fell dead.*

One other thing = SISERA is a type for the Devil. And the hammer and nail pictures how God was victorious in smashing the DEVIL’S head (Gen 3:15) / The Hammer and Nail that pinned Jesus to the Cross DESTROYED the works of the devil

28 *“The mother of Sisera looked through the window, And cried out through the lattice, ‘Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarries the clatter of his chariots?’*
29 *Her wisest ladies answered her, Yes, she answered herself,*
30 *‘Are they not finding and dividing the spoil: To every man a girl or two; For Sisera, plunder of dyed garments, Plunder of garments embroidered and dyed, Two pieces of dyed embroidery for the neck of the looter?’*

Deborah imagines how Sisera’s people imagine he is slow in returning as he is spoiling his enemy Israel / not realizing he is never coming back / his defeat would never cross their mind

31 *“Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD! But let those who love Him be like the sun When it comes out in full strength.”*

So, Deborah finishes her song in a triumph—gloating over the enemy. It seems unfitting to kick your enemy when they are down, but this enemy is a TYPE of devil! It pictures the triumph in Jesus’ victory over satan.

So the land had rest for forty years.