

Session 2

June 9, 2019

“DEBORAH: ENCOURAGING FAITH”

Judges 4:1-9; 5:1-5

It’s hard to think of Deborah, the judge of Israel, without picturing Israel’s enemy Sisera dead with a tent peg through his head. Actually, Deborah cannot claim credit for that execution, as it was another lady—Jael, wife of Heber—who gets credit for that one. But Deborah is the one who lit a fire under Barak, God’s servant, to rout the enemy’s army and secure forty years of peace among His people.

The oppression (4:1-3). The period of the judges was a 300+ year rollercoaster ride between national stability and instability, covering the time from the death of Joshua to that of Samuel. The cycle generally consisted of some enemy taking over Israel (because of their sin), followed by God raising up a judge to deliver them. In Deborah’s case, twenty years of harsh oppression under the cruel hand of Jabin, king of Canaan, brought God’s people to repentance, and they “cried out to the Lord.” Verse 4 introduces us to Deborah, who served as both a prophetess and a judge. The role of the prophetess—a woman prophet—was to act as a spokesperson for God. This was a both a special gift from God as well as a calling. The role of judge was also a gift and calling. Eighteenth-century Baptist scholar John Gill wrote that Deborah was “eminently endowed with gifts and grace; she endeavored to convince the people of their sins, exhorted them to repentance, and was a means of reforming them, and administering justice and judgment in all cases brought before her.” This she did from the shade of the palm trees in the hill country.

The plan (vv. 6-7). As shown by her emphatic explanation that followed, Deborah’s summons of Barak was not her own idea, but ordered from above. The prophetess and judge had been with God. Barak was specifically called and issued specific instructions. God chose the location (a valley near Mount Tabor), the number of warriors (ten thousand from the two tribes mentioned), and the battle plan (God would lure the enemy in), and then He guaranteed the victory!

The plea (vv. 8-9). Barak’s plea for Deborah’s presence is understandable. The general was no doubt thinking of the fate of his army and the future of God’s people. He was being called to confront a brutal king known for his army of iron chariots (v. 3). Who wouldn’t want the benefit of having God’s prophetess-judge along for support? It’s Barak’s follow-up statement that indicates his wavering faith: “If you will not go with me, I will not go.” Deborah’s immediate acceptance of Barak’s invitation to join him accomplished two purposes. First, it modeled the kind of bold faith needed to follow God in times of crises. Second, it served as a not-so-gentle rebuke of Barak’s weakness, made evident by the condition she placed on him in verse 9, roughly translated as: “Ok, but understand that if you choose the path of including me, you won’t receive the honor that goes with the victory. That honor will be given to a woman.” Whether she was referring to herself, who motivated Barak, or to Jael, the one who nailed Sisera to the ground (v. 21), is unclear. Either way, the women got all the credit, and Barak received none.

The praise (5:1-5). Once the victory was won, a song of triumph was sung by both Deborah and Barak. Deborah’s encouragement had bolstered the faith of Barak, and he seemed to have no problem giving credit to the ladies. Yet the real credit was given to God, who confounded the enemy army and mired their great chariots in greater amounts of mud. But before those details

are mentioned, the victory song teaches the lesson of how God's people work together in times of crises; and it all needs to be done with courageous faith: leaders need to lead; volunteers need to volunteer; and everyone needs to come together in praising the Lord!