

## Session 2

July 28, 2024

Barak

Judges 4:4-8,12-16; 5:1-5

The tale of Deborah and Barak and Sisera and the tent peg is one the great stories of the Bible. We often get it mixed up and think that Deborah did the hammer-job on Sisera's head, but that was accomplished by another lady named Jael. Regardless, it's a great story about some remarkable women and a pretty capable army commander. Three thoughts come to mind.

**Be open (4:4-8).** Here we are introduced to Deborah. She is a unique individual in Israel's history. She was the nation's only female judge, and a prophetess to boot. As a judge, she led the nation. As a prophetess, she was a mouthpiece for God. According to verse 5, the people normally came to her to settle disputes. In this case, she received word from the Lord regarding Barak and the coming fight with Sisera's army. Hence, speaking as a prophetess, she sent for Barak. The details are clear. In verses 6 and 7, she told him how many troops to summon, from which tribes to draw them, where they were to deploy, and how the enemy army would be drawn into battle. And most importantly, she told him that the army he commanded would win the victory (v. 7). So, what do we make of Barak's response in verse 8? Most of the time he is branded a coward who needed a woman to bail him out. Certainly, his faith may have wavered, just like Gideon's, or Abraham's, or Moses' or even Peter's. More likely, Barak had great confidence in Deborah and her judgment. She was in charge of this revelation and as such, Barak may have wanted her nearby. Notice too that Barak didn't even flinch when Deborah chided him about a woman getting all the glory. No doubt, in his mind, beating Sisera was more important than who got the credit for it. For reflection: *So, who was "open" to help in this story? Was Barak open to the Lord's leadership? Was he open to helping Deborah? Was Deborah open to Barak's conditions? What can we learn from all of this?*

**Be obedient (4:12-16).** Even with Deborah's guarantee, the task assigned to Barak was a daunting one. It was true that Barak held the high ground (v. 12). But Sisera summoned all of his forces, including the "900 chariots of iron" mentioned in verse 3. The chariots were obviously Sisera's pride and joy; the centerpiece of his military. When Barak's army started down the hill (v. 14), Sisera must have been thrilled. What kind of fool leaves the high ground to engage 900 iron chariots on the level plains, where the chariots held a clear advantage? The kind of fool who has God on his side and Deborah's promise to claim, that's who! It's not clear exactly what threw Sisera's forces "into confusion," but when this word is used, it is always in the context of direct divine influence. In other words, God threw them into confusion! And such was the rout, that Sisera's only perceived escape was to leave his chariot and mix with the soldiers on foot. While he was saved from the massacre (at least temporarily), the rest of the army was not. All were killed "by the edge of the sword" (v. 16), such that "not a single man was left." For reflection: *What do we learn from Sisera's actions in this story? Do you think he was a bold commander? Or a foolish one? Why?*

**Be appreciative (5:1-5).** Here we see another song of praise and thanksgiving offered after one of God's deliverances. The song seems to have been composed by Deborah alone (see v. 7)

which is in line with the characteristics of a prophetess. That Barak joined in the singing indicates his risen status before Deborah specifically and very likely the people in general. As well, it seems that the song was a duet only, as no other singers are mentioned and the song neatly fits the genre of “antiphony;” that is, one verse sung by one singer (or group) followed by an answer sung back by another singer or group. Many have dissected the song of praise and triumph offered by the victors in these 31 verses. The section covered here is a general recounting and acknowledgement of God’s divine intervention and His magnificence displayed in deliverances of the past. For reflection: *What do you think is the purpose of songs such as these? As songs (or poems), should they be regarded with the same authority as “regular” Scripture? Why or why not?*