

Deborah and Barak's Victory Song

Judges 5

Judges 5 – “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! I, even I, will sing to the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel. 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.

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. 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! ¹⁰ “Speak, you who ride on white donkeys, who sit in judges’ attire, and who walk along the road. 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, and sing a song! Arise, Barak, and lead your captives away, O son of Abinoam! ¹³ “Then the survivors came down, the people against the nobles; the LORD came down for me against the mighty. ¹⁴ From Ephraim were those whose roots were in Amalek. After you, Benjamin, with your peoples, from Machir rulers came down, and from Zebulun those who bear the recruiter’s staff. And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; as Issachar, so was Barak sent into the valley under his command; among the divisions of Reuben there were great resolves of heart.” 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. ¹⁸ Zebulun is a people who jeopardized their lives to the point of death; Naphtali also, on the heights of the battlefield.

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. They fought from the heavens; the stars from their courses fought against Sisera. The torrent of Kishon swept them away, that ancient torrent, the torrent of Kishon. O my soul, march on in strength! 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.’

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. ²⁸ "The mother of Sisera looked through the window, and cried out through the lattice, 'Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why carries the clatter of his chariots?' Her wisest ladies answered her: 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?' 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 the land had rest for forty years."

Background Notes

In Judges 4 we have the account of Israel's military victory over King Jabin of Hazor and his Canaanite army. Hazor had risen to power again after the conquest of Canaan by Joshua. For twenty years the Lord allowed the Canaanites to harshly oppress Israel until they cried out to the Lord. God raised up Deborah as both a prophetess and judge for Israel. Deborah predicted victory and motivated her general, Barak, to muster the troops together to fight the impressive army of the Canaanites, who were commanded by General Sisera. Although Israel was greatly outnumbered and under-armed, God fought for Israel and gave them the victory.

Judges 5 gives us Deborah and Barak's song, celebrating this great victory. Notice that the song is written in Hebrew poetry. It is more than just a victory song - it's a song of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord for His victory over His enemy. In other words, it's not like a football team's chant after they've won the Super Bowl! No. This is a victory song celebrating the Lord's victory over the Lord's enemies. This point is important to keep in mind, especially when we read the slow-motion detailed account of how Jael killed Sisera (v26-27). It's not gloating because of a victory over a personal enemy. No. Gloating is unbiblical. This song is the savoring of **God's** victory over His people's enemy.

This victory song provides further details of the account in Judges 4. Notice the condition in Israel under the Canaanite oppression: *"In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were deserted, and the travelers walked along the byways. Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel, until I, Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel."*

Verse 21 gives us the details of how the Lord fought for Israel. He sent a cloudburst and a flash flood into the Jezreel Valley. As the Kishon River overflowed, Sisera and his army were swept away. In verses 28-30 we see Sisera's mother watching out her window, wondering why Sisera was taking so long to return. Sisera would never return, because he fought against God's people and God fought for Israel.

Doctrinal Points

1. God keeps records of the faithful.

In verses 13-15 and 18 we read of the faithful men who fought for Israel with Deborah and Barak: the faithful from Ephraim, the faithful from Benjamin and the faithful from Machir (that would be the half-tribe of Manasseh who lived on the west side of the Jordan River). The faithful from Zebulun risked their lives to the point of death (v18). The faithful from Issachar and the faithful from Naphtali prevented the enemy from taking the high ground (v18). These tribes all showed faith and courage. They followed Barak down into the valley against overwhelming odds. Remember that Sisera and the Canaanites had 900 iron chariots and weapons, and many more troops than Israel had.

What courage and faith the 10,000 troops under Barak showed! God kept a record of their courage in His Word, and His Word endures forever. In Malachi 3:16 we read, *“Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, And the LORD listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name.”*

God keeps records of believers who are faithful, and that’s what the “Judgment Seat of Christ” is all about. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”* God keeps records, and faithful believers will be rewarded. Maybe you’ve been serving the Lord with faith and courage, but you’ve never received recognition or reward here on earth. Listen! God has noticed - and you will be rewarded! God keeps records of the faithful.

2. God keeps records of the unfaithful.

In verses 15-17 and verse 23 we read about the unfaithful in Israel, those people who would not fight for the Lord.

Verse 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.’”* Meroz was a town in the area of the battle, and its people didn’t join in the fight. Notice that the **Angel of the LORD Himself** cursed them because they didn’t come to fight the enemies of **the Lord**.

Verses 15-16: *“And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; as Issachar, so was Barak sent into the valley under his command; Among the divisions of Reuben there were great resolves of heart. Why did you sit among the sheepfolds, to hear the pipings for the flocks? The divisions of Reuben have great searchings of heart.”* The Reubenites were concerned, but they were not committed. They deliberated about it, but they made no decision to go. They showed some interest - but they didn’t enlist. They were like many “would-be soldiers of the cross” today. They were unfaithful. And God keeps a record.

Verse 17: *“Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan...”* Gilead included the tribes of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh that lived on the east side of the Jordan River, and they stayed at home, beyond the Jordan. Maybe they thought they were too far away to get involved in battle. Have you ever heard that excuse? They were unfaithful. And God kept a record.

Verse 17: *“And why did Dan remain on ships?”* Dan was too interested in business and commerce to get involved. It’s the same excuse we hear in our Lord’s parable in Luke 14:18-19: *“They all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.’”* The same excuses are made today. And God keeps records of the unfaithful.

Verse 17: *“Asher continued at the seashore, and stayed by his inlets.”* Asher stayed at the seashore; Asher preferred the easy life. In effect, Asher said, “Don’t disrupt my security and comfort.” Sound familiar? Asher was unfaithful. And God kept a record.

What about us? Are we making excuses? Are we content with the status quo? Are we too involved in our careers? Are we concerned but not willing to commit, like Reuben? These things that keep a non-Christian from coming to Christ, and they’re also the things that keep a Christian from being faithful! Where is our faith and courage? There will be no rewards for **unfaithfulness** at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Little faithfulness = little reward. God keeps records of the unfaithful.

Practical Application

Don't forget to sing hymns!

Most Christians don’t need this application because most Christians enjoy singing! For some Christians, however, singing is lower on the priority list than it should be. I happen to be in that category. I’d rather be studying Scripture or talking about the faith than singing! But I mustn’t forget about singing hymns, because it’s actually a command in the Bible. Colossians 3:16 says, *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”*

Deborah and Barak are good models for us here. They model the **priority of praise!** In this praise song they recount, step-by-step, in detail, what God had done for Israel, and they thanked Him and praised Him for His help.

That’s the great thing about hymns of praise. There are great truths in hymns about the Lord and what He has done for us, and many praise songs incorporate praise directly from Scripture. Singing “hymns and spiritual songs” forces us (forces us in a good way!) to magnify the Lord, and thank Him for what He’s done for us.

So hear this practical application from Judges 5: Don’t forget to sing hymns!