

## **God's Superhero's – Deborah and Barak**

### **Faith for Action**

### **Judges 4:9**

#### **Introduction**

The book of Judges chronicles the 339 years between the death of Joshua and Israel's first king, Saul. The time of the judges was a very wicked period in Israel's history. The Israelites began to intermarry with the Canaanites which soon led to their idolatry. The scriptures say that God told Israel to drive all the inhabitants out of the land so that wouldn't happen. But when Israel failed to do that it wasn't long before the young men of Israel took wives of their non-Jewish neighbors, and were led back into idolatry. So God would bring judgment on His people in the form of foreign oppression. Then Israel would cry out to God for deliverance, and God would raise up a judge who would rescue the people.

This cycle of behavior is the background of the story: The people would go astray, the suffering for their sins would come, the people would ask God for help, God would send a judge who would deliver, the deliverer would die -- and the cycle would begin all over again. All of this was foreshadowing the need for a leader who wouldn't die -- Jesus. This "cycle" occurs 7 times in the book of Judges, though 12 different judges.

Judges 21:25 records that during this time, "there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes". Judges chapter 4 opens with the Israelites in trouble once again. They had been delivered from one oppressive enemy only to forget God and again do what was evil in his sight. God has now sent another oppressive enemy to discipline Israel until they repent and return to him. Jabin, king of Canaan oppressed the Israelites harshly for 20 years. Finally the people began to repent and call out to God. Our text today occurred during these times. (Read Judges Chapter 4)

Deborah is the 4th judge of Israel and the only woman judge. She was also a prophetess. During these dark days of Israelite history, purity and godliness were almost non-existent. Deborah was a judge of Israel for many years but her most memorable action was when she had the faith to challenge Barak and Israel's army to believe God and go out to battle against Sisera, the general of King Jabin's army.

God raised up Deborah to be a judge in Israel after the people had been severely oppressed by King Jabin of Hazor. God spoke to Deborah under her palm tree between Bethel and Ramah. She was to send for a man named Barak in Naphtali and tell him to take ten thousand soldiers to Mount Tabor. There he would fight against King Jabin's army.

The forces that Barak assembled were neither properly equipped, nor adequately trained which made him reluctant to go out and fight against the Canaanite army. They had chariots and well-trained fighting men not to mention that Israel was greatly

outnumbered. So Barak refused to go unless Deborah, as leader of Israel, would go with them. She agreed to go with him, however she told Barak that he would forfeit the recognition for the victory and instead it would go to a woman.

In Judges 4:9 Deborah tells Barak, "I will go with you but because you did not trust God, and did not go when God called you, the honor of this war will not be yours, for God will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman."

One of the first things we learn about faith is that it requires courage.

## **I. Courage is Required**

Faith requires courage and courage requires action! Extraordinary courage belongs to those who believe God (Judges 4.6-10).

God had already commanded Barak to assemble an army on Mount Tabor. However, Barak was afraid to carry through on God's order to him. He allowed himself to be intimidated by the enemy. How often do we find ourselves afraid to follow through on God's leading in our lives because we fear an enemy?

Barak was only willing to obey God if Deborah went with him. Deborah possessed great courage because she believed God. Deborah chose to believe God when he promised to deliver them if they obeyed. Barak faltered in faith. If Barak had believed God he would have obeyed God. So Deborah chastises Barak for his lack of courage, telling him that he would receive no honor because the enemy would fall into a woman's hand.

Sometimes God waits to add His blessing and answer prayer until the people believe he will answer (Judges 4.12-16). Deborah reminds Barak "Hasn't the Lord gone before you?" Deborah knew the overwhelming might of the Canaanite army could not stand against the Israelites because their God would fight for them. God threw the enemy army into confusion and delivered them to the Israelites. Not a single enemy soldier survived the battle.

But God waited until the leadership was willing to take Him at his word before he delivered Israel. Courageous faith is what pleases God. God chooses to use those who will allow themselves to be His instruments - not those we think should be used (Judges 4.4-5).

Deborah was a woman, serving as prophetess and judge among the Israelites. That may not seem significant to us today, but in the culture of the day women had very little social standing and almost no legal standing. A woman serving as prophetess and judge was quite amazing. Verse 5 also tells us Deborah was also a wife and Chapter 5:7 tells us she was also a mother. Deborah is not exactly who you might expect God to use as prophet, judge and courageous military leader.

The Bible, however, is full of examples of God calling unqualified people to his work. God does not always call the qualified but God always qualifies those he calls. God chooses people who will allow Him to use them to bring Him glory. During a desperate time in Israel, God awakened Deborah and Barak to see that the only way the nation could escape the stifling tyranny of the Canaanite King Jabin was to meet his superior forces in battle.

On the surface, it appeared to be a substantial mismatch ... but only if the power of God is left out of the equation. Instead, God not only motivated Deborah and Barak to attempt the impossible, He raised up the people to fight, and opened up the heavens to pour out the rain, and the battle was won.

In life, we all face battles. How you choose to respond to them will greatly determine the outcome. To act in faith requires courage. If you look at the circumstances and situations alone you will be overwhelmed and tempted to give in to your fears. But if you remember to factor in God's love and power, you know that in spite of the circumstances you will be victorious with God's help! Every time we read about a Judge or Deliverer we ought to remember that our deliverance was accomplished because God sent His Son to be our Deliverer and give us the victory.

## **II. Faith is Rewarded**

When God inspires someone with the courage to step out and in faith and they do – God always rewards their faith. Honor belongs to those who are willing to be used by God (Judges 4.17-24). Jael exhibited tremendous courage - more courage than Barak. She killed the enemy while he slept in her tent by hammering a stake through his temple (v. 21-22). It took a lot of courage to do what she did. She showed no signs of changing her mind - she hammered the stake right through into the ground. Jael acted without regard for her own safety or security and as word of her heroism spread Jael was celebrated and honored for her courageous role in bringing deliverance to the Israelites (5.24-27)

The honor could have gone to Barak but his fears kept him from believing God But all the people gave great honor to Jael on account of her courage and faith, for by that act she set the people free from the king who had been oppressing Israel. After this the land had rest for many years.

God's blessings always come upon those who have the courage to serve him. And that blessing also benefits others around them (Judges 5.31-6.1). Israel enjoyed 40 years of peace because of a Godly woman named Deborah. Will you be a blessing or a stumbling block to those who follow you? Do you have the courage to act in faith or does fear cause you to keep silent? Deborah was willing to be used of God and ended up being recorded forever in the history of God's people. The life of Deborah is a celebration of believing God despite the circumstances we find ourselves in. God can be trusted to deliver what he promised. Those who courageously act in faith believe that the battle belongs to the Lord and He will always be victorious.

### **III. God is reliable**

From Mt. Tabor Deborah could clearly see the storm clouds forming to the southwest, even fifty miles away beyond Mount Carmel. She knew when to tell Barak to go down into the Kishon River valley. The clouds were hidden from Sisera's view by the mountains. As Sisera's 900 armored chariots and army were bearing down on Barak and the Israeli freedom fighters it seems that it's really no contest. Then all of the sudden a storm comes up over the mountain range and catches Sisera and his army by surprise.

Suddenly the might of the chariots is defeated the same way the Egyptian chariots had been defeated at the Red Sea—stuck in mud! The archers could not see to shoot straight for the torrential rain. The foot soldiers were unsupported and their armor was too heavy to run fast. The chariots were stuck in the mud. Harosheth was further away than the ten miles that a horse could run without resting. Without warning the advantage had swung towards Israel's meager army. Even Sisera's chariot was stuck in the mud; so he jumped out of it and ran several miles to what he thought was an ally, Heber the Kenite (a descendant of Moses' brother-in-law). Appealing to Heber's wife Jael to hide him, he was fed and went to sleep in her tent. Then she slew him and later showed Barak the body.

Of course, Barak was well rewarded with victory, but not with the victor's glory. God's word is always reliable! Once we develop the courage and decide to take action, God can reward our faith with divine intervention. Have you ever allowed God to work miraculously through your circumstances? Do you have a faith that relies upon God? Psalm 9:10 and they that know your name will put their trust in you: for you, LORD, have not forsaken those that seek you.

We live in a society of changing values and morals but there is still one thing that people still look for and require and that's reliability. A person who is unreliable is quickly detected and avoided. Sadly, even businesses today have developed this characteristic. They use clever and deceptive practices to deceive prospective customers into spending resources on things the company doesn't ever intend to deliver on.

Coupled with reliability is trustworthiness. If a person is reliable, then you can trust that person to follow through on their promises. Reliability is delivering what was promised; its "coming through" – even when the odds are against you.

If God has revealed something to us in His Word, we can fully place our confidence and trust in His promises. Deut 29:29 The secret things belong to the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout the book of Judges, the people turn away from God (usually embracing the gods of their Canaanite neighbors), lose favor and freedom, become oppressed by their gentile neighbors, cry out to God for deliverance, are delivered and repent for a short time, live in peace and prosperity before beginning the cycle all over again. Each time the cycle repeats, however, the moral fiber of the nation deteriorates a little more, until (by the end of the book) it is thoroughly corrupt.

Israel's initial struggle of remaining faithful to God slowly transforms until it becomes a degenerate nation at war with itself. Tragically that is the story of many people today. They are caught in a cycle of sin that is wearing them down and sucking the faith right out of their heart.

It takes courage to break the cycle of sin and despair. It takes faith to act on the promises of God's word and it takes a belief and confidence in the reliability of God to divinely interveign to defeat the enemy and break you free of the cycle of sin. Do you have the courage to trust in the Lord with all your heart or are you leaning upon your own wisdom and understanding. God wants to give you the victory in your life. Do you have the courage to let him?