

# Join the Fight

## Judges 4-5

### INTRO

- Judges takes place in cycles: not a beginning-to-end sequence – parallel, not serial
- Here's an example of how the cycle works:
- God has promised blessings would flow from faithfulness – early in ch.2, God “I will never break my covenant with you”
- Joshua dies and the cycle begins – Turn away from God – apostasy, God (who keeps his covenant) is angered against them, and he gives them over to the followers of the false gods and the people suffer as a result.
- They repent, follow for a time, then again turn away from God. And the cycle continues – apostasy, suffering, repentance, deliverance
- Judges collects all the accounts of these cycles and puts them together – not necessarily in order. Seems to be a progression of themes – each account of a judge presents us with a different emphasis.
- Events of today's passage and the Judge Deborah occur at the same time as the events of Samson in chs 13-16

### • **TRANS - PRESENT NARRATIVE**

- Judges 4 and 5 address the same events – ch. 4 is a simple narrative, straight history, without interpretation or elaboration.
- It introduces the main characters – the Judge and Prophetess Deborah, the Israelite Leader/Commander Barak, the pagan King Jabin and his General Sisera, and Jael, the wife of a nomad, who just happened to move to the area from his tribal home in the south.
- Ch. 5 is a Song, from Deborah and Barak – it's a praise to God, but in it, we get some interpretation of events / a guide as to how to look at the events of ch 4.
- Will move between the two chapters as we pull out a few points from these passages
- Leads us to the first point of the sermon

### I. Recognize the Main Threat

- **ILL** – WWII US had two Primary Enemies – Germans in Europe and N. Africa, and the Japanese in Asia and the Pacific.
- Strategic determination to focus war efforts on the primary threat, the greatest danger to America, Nazi Germany. Japan was a threat, just not as grave.
- Text tells us what the primary threat was . . .

**Judges 4:1-3** *And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD after Ehud died.<sup>2</sup> And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim.<sup>3</sup> Then the people of Israel cried out to the LORD for help, for he had 900 chariots of iron and he oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for twenty years.*

- Verse 4 says the people “did what was evil”
- The first cycle in Judges begins in Ch. 3 – **Jud 3:7** “*And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. They forgot the Lord their God and served the Baals and the Asheteroth.*”
- This is the common sin in each of the cycles – so much so, that after this point, that the description of the problem is shortened to a simple “And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord”
- That’s all that needs to be said. It’s the same sin, again and again, of turning from the Lord to false Gods.
- Might think the big problem was Jabin and the Canaanites – it was not
- Isr. problem was idolatry/apostasy – turning from what is right. Everything that follows is fruit from that bad root
- Idolatry is not only a sinful alternative – it’s a sinful alternative with painful consequences
- They abandoned their dependence upon God, so God put them in a place where their dependence upon him was undeniably obvious
- That’s the problem – it’s not that we fail to depend upon God, we fail to *recognize* our dependence upon God. We think we do not need him, when every person ever born needs God
- The response of God begins in vs 2 – “the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin the King”
- God did this – the problem wasn’t being put under the power of a pagan king – the problem was following false gods. That is the root problem
- Cause and effect – the cause was idolatry, the effect was being under the rule of a pagan king
- The Song of Deborah explains it like this:

**Judges 5:8** *When new gods were chosen, then war was in the gates.*

- Idolatry brought conflict
- The main threat was the spiritual issue, not the physical situation – if you only remove the rule of the foreign king, the real problem of idolatry continues
- This is where the fight actually begins – God fights for the righteousness of his people – the oppression of the Canaanites was a tool God used to turn the hearts of Isr.
- Moses delivered these words to the nation two generations prior:

**Deuteronomy 8:1-5** *"The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD swore to give to your fathers. <sup>2</sup> And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. <sup>3</sup> And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. <sup>4</sup> Your clothing did not wear out on you and your foot did not swell these forty years. <sup>5</sup> Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you.*

- God disciplined Isr. out of love for them – as a father disciplines a son
- Your primary enemy is not your difficult situation – that is the fruit of a deeper issue, the real enemy
- Every day we fight a battle for belief – to believe God, to hear his voice and respond to him in faith.
- This is why Paul tells us in Romans 14:23 “ . . . whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.”
- Isr. began responded correctly – the discipline had it effect
- The people cried out to the Lord for help –They did turn back to God . . . *imperfectly*
- That’s not to say that 900 iron chariots are not a big problem – they are, but they weren’t the primary problem
- Consider this – Jabin and Sisera had those 900 iron chariots before Israel turned from God. They weren’t a problem then.
- Idolatry/apostasy brought conflict – your primary fight is a fight for belief

## II. God Secures the Victory

- Judges 4 continues: Deborah summons Barak and confronts him. She confronts him with the Words of the Lord:

**Judges 4:6-7** *She sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali and said to him, "Has not the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you, 'Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun.'<sup>7</sup> And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand?"*

- Don't miss this point – verse 6 says, “Has not the Lord commanded you”?
- God had already spoken – he had already promised them that they would defeat Sisera
- Barak finally obeys and gathers his forces

**Judges 4:14-15** *And Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the LORD go out before you?" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him.<sup>15</sup> And the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword. And Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot.*

**Judges 5:4-5** *"LORD, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens dropped, yes, the clouds dropped water.<sup>5</sup> The mountains quaked before the LORD, even Sinai before the LORD, the God of Israel.*

- The fight was the Lord's – he engaged in battle for his people
- You think 900 chariots shake the ground – look at what God does . . .
- Not a new thing for the people – their short memories, their doubting memories had led them to forget Gods promise through Moses to Joshua as they prepared to enter the Promised Land and face many enemies there

**Joshua 10:41-42** *And Joshua struck them from Kadesh-barnea as far as Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, as far as Gibeon.<sup>42</sup> And Joshua captured all these kings and their land at one time, because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel.*

- Here too, we see the victory that came from the promise of God, His covenant – it's the land promised to his people, therefore victory is God's work.
- If you feel pressure to bring about a particular outcome in your service of God, you are putting the expectation in the wrong place
- God is a warrior who delivers victory – he does not deliver chances, and opportunities, and possibilities – he delivers victory, assurance, sure hope, promise, confidence
- God promised the land, not an opportunity to get land – God fulfills his promise

## TRANS

- You may already have this question in-mind: if God the one who secures the victory, what does he need Barak and his army?
- I have an answer – look at ch 4:23-24

**Judges 4:23-24** *So on that day God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan before the people of Israel. <sup>24</sup> And the hand of the people of Israel pressed harder and harder against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.*

### III. You are not a Spectator

- God accomplishes the victory – often he calls us to participate in the battle
- Do you recall the main issue – Isr. had turned from God, the people had violated the covenant, had failed to fulfill their requirements, fellowship with God was destroyed.
- When they turned back to God and called on him, the relationship was healed, fellowship was reestablished
- And as Christians, we are under a new covenant, and Jesus has already perfectly and completely fulfilled the terms of that covenant.
- So why do we fight? We're fighting for our sanctification. We're fighting for our godliness and for righteousness in our lives.
- The battle against Sisera and his army was a fight against the fruit of sinfulness, the effects of idolatry and unrighteousness.
- That's a picture of the Christian life – we turn to God, and are delivered from sin and the penalty for it, but our lives are filled with the ongoing fight against sin, the effects of sin, and the influences of sin
- In Judges, the task was to remove the false gods and the fruit of idolatry from the land.
- Saying – “God ordains the means”
- God not only ordains what will be done, but how it will be done

**Judges 4:15** *And the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword.*

- Could sustain us without any participation from us – He does not need us
- **ILL** – destroyed the Egyptian army without Israel's participation. Keep walking, the Lord defeated them
- Our tendency is to look at the means and see them as causing the result – some plant, some water, God gives the growth (1 Cor 3:6)
- Calls us into his work – we glorify him by reflecting his actions

- When we follow Christ, we enter into his work – we do the work of our master when we follow him
- Jesus said this:

**Luke 6:40** *A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.*

- **ILL** – In your role as parents, it is your task to instruct your children and teach them how to live, to successfully carry out the tasks of life. It gives you joy to teach them and see them learn a task and excel in it. Think about the joy a parent has when their sons or daughters excel at something they themselves do
- Mentor receives joy from seeing his or her protégé learn skills and then put them into practice
- **Q** – So then, What is required of me
- Deborah's song makes our role clear:

**Judges 5:1-2, 9** *Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day:<sup>2</sup> "That the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the LORD! . . . My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel who offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless the LORD.*

- This is the heart of obedience – it is not simple conformity to a law, obedience is conforming our character, nature, actions, and desires to those of Christ
- In faith we act upon what God has said.
- Promise of victory flows from God's covenant/from his promise to his people – they don't earn the promise from obedience. Christ already earned it.
- The covenant precedes the gift
- Didn't win the fight because they were obedient – God had already promised victory, but they did need to fight to enjoy the blessing of victory
- I live, think and act because of promise, not to gain the promise
- Faith is how we receive what God has given (see Heb 11)
- ILL – someone depositing money into your account. It's already there, all you need to do to benefit from it is draw upon the account
- Judges 4 is not a fight for battlefield supremacy – it is a fight for belief.
- Isr. won the fight not because they were better, stronger, or larger, they won because God said they would win
- Don't miss this point – verse 6 says, "Has not the Lord commanded you"?
- God had already spoken – he had already promised them that they would defeat Sisera

- Clearing out the promised land was much more than making space to live – it was about preparing a place for Isr. to display to the world that God reigns – we have the same call
- Christian, God is not calling us to clear the enemy out of a piece of land, he is calling us to remove every evidence of the former rule of sin in our lives
- When God calls us to enter into the fight, he calls us to display his glory, his victory, to be his image in this world
- We are called to show that we truly have received every promise
- God said sin has no more dominion over you, yet we live like it does
- In your life, you have the call to display to the world, to be salt and light, a city on a hill that declares to this fallen world that Jesus Reigns
- Not fighting people – Paul describes our fight like this

**Ephesians 6:12** *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

- Our struggle is not against human armies – human armies can be defeated by other human armies.
- We are in a fight that only God can fight and win – he calls us to engage in that fight – we're in a fight for righteousness
- That's clearly seen in the description of the armor that we are to wear later in Eph 6 – not physical armor but spiritual armor for a spiritual fight
- **Q** - Initially, what kept Barak from fulfilling the promise of God – why did he need to be challenged by Deborah?
- Fear – 900 iron chariots. Mentioned twice. To the fight, Sisera brought 900 iron chariots and all his men. Chariots and foot soldiers. Fear will keep you from the fight
- What had they forgotten from their own history – exodus, previous faithlessness and wilderness wandering, previous conquests . . .
- He had forgotten God's covenant . . .

**Deuteronomy 3:22** *You shall not fear them, for it is the LORD your God who fights for you.'*

- Idolatry had weakened their faith – if you have not been following God, you might doubt that he fights for you
- An army of 900 iron chariots are a fearful thing. A Holy God is more fearful
- What are the 900 iron chariots in your life? What are they in the life of this church – what promises of God are already ours to receive – yet we do not have them because we do not believe what God has said

- What makes **you** fearful, afraid to believe the Word of God and act in faith.
- **ILL** – Foie Gras. lit. *fatty liver*. Years fearful to try it – sounded awful.
- Jesus talked about our temptation to live in fear and anxiety

**Matthew 6:24-34** *"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.<sup>25</sup> "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?<sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?<sup>27</sup> And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?<sup>28</sup> And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,<sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.<sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?<sup>31</sup> Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'<sup>32</sup> For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.<sup>33</sup> But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.<sup>34</sup> "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

- Seek the kingdom/righteousness first and foremost – the necessary things of this world will be added. Focus on the kingdom, not the things of the world – God will take care of those things.
- Humility/Pride – Barak too concerned about the fight itself – what would happen to him and his Army. Could he be any more concerned about the people than God was – NO.
- He lacked humility to obey, and lost the prize of the battle – capture/kill Sisera
- Credit to God – he exalts, he humbles
- If Barak had humbled himself b/f God, and believed God's Word he would have been exalted in gaining the prize of battle, the enemy general Sisera
- Instead, God truly shows that he is the Lord of the Battle – the prize of the battle, Sisera the mighty general, is given to a non-combatant, a tent-wife named Jael
- Of this woman, Deborah sings, *"She sent her hand to the tent peg and her right hand to the workmen's mallet; she struck Sisera; she crushed his head; she shattered and pierced his temple."* **Judges 5:26**

## CONC

- Israel's problem – they quit fighting (for righteousness?) when they turned to idols
- Fear kept them from believing God's Word and entering into his blessing – have faith in God, and obey
- Engage God's enemies for he has already secured each victory
  
- Remember how we said chapter 4 is a simple straightforward narrative, while chapter 5, the song about the fight, deals with the themes and spiritual significance of the battle –
- Deborah's song has lines about the earth trembling, mountains quaking, "from heaven the stars fought,"
- Reminds us that this is much more than a fight between armies – this is a spiritual battle, for the worship, faith in, and obedience to the Lord.
- Don't simply look at your daily struggles as physical fights (RW) see them for their spiritual significance – you have the opportunity in your daily life to reflect God . . .
  
- The song in ch 5 concludes

**Judges 5:31** *"So may all your enemies perish, O LORD! But your friends be like the sun as he rises in his might." And the land had rest for forty years.*