

September 5

Scriptures: Read Judges 4 & 5

Key Verse: "... Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the Lord gone out before you?..." (Judges 4:14)

Overview

A twenty-year period of harsh oppression and bondage from the Canaanite king Jabin came as a result of Israel's apostasy after the death of Ehud. About one hundred years earlier, Joshua had destroyed the capital city of Hazor and another king named Jabin (Josh.11:11), but they must have gradually crept back into the land and regained their strength. Israel, however, was in a shamefully weakened condition. There was no faithful, courageous male leader to be found among the Israelites, so God raised up Deborah, a wise, godly, well-respected woman who was both a prophetess and a judge. She must have been an Ephraimite, since she judged from the territory of south Ephraim and it seems she only dealt with civil matters until God led her to become involved in the military action that brought deliverance to Israel.

Deborah chose Barak to form and lead an army against Jabin's strongman, General Sisera. As God's spokesperson, she informed Barak of God's plan and told him that God would deliver the enemy into his hand. Still Barak must have lacked full confidence in God, and would agree to go only if Deborah went with him, since her presence represented the presence of God. Her response further illustrates the weakness of male leadership at that time (4:9), but Barak mustered up enough faith to wage war. He was victorious by God's power and came to be considered a hero of faith (Heb.11:32).

Barak rallied together an army of ten thousand from the northern tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun just as God had ordered (4:6, 10; cf.5:18). The Lord knew that the men from the other tribes were indifferent and not prepared to obey (cf.5:15-17). To those who were obedient, however, the Lord gave a great victory, just as Deborah had prophesied (v.14). God's divine intervention was clearly seen in the battle: we also learn from chapter five that God miraculously flooded the river of Kishon, which rendered the enemy's chariots useless and "swept them away" (5:21)

The battle would not be finished until the enemy leader was caught and killed. Sisera fled to hide in the tent of Heber the Kenite, whom he knew to be at peace with king Jabin (4:11, 17). Heber's wife, Jael, however, must not have been of the same persuasion as her husband, for she showed loyalty to Israel and the God of Israel by cunningly planning a way to kill Sisera. By the time his pursuers reached her tent, she had already killed him, rendering a great service to Israel. She was therefore considered a heroine (5:24-27).

The victory caused Deborah and Barak to compose and sing a song of celebration and praise to God for His divine intervention on behalf of His people. The song is full of emotion and is typical of Hebrew poetry in rhythm, parallelism, and imagery (e.g.5:7, 26-27).

The song begins by expressing the Lord's great power (5:4-5), then the poor condition of Israel under oppression because "they chose new gods", yet God chose a "mother" to comfort the hurting and lifeless Israel (5:7-8). Though they had no weapons, the "villagers" and "survivors"

came into the gates of the city and the Lord came down with the poor to defeat the mighty (5:10-13). The middle of the song praises the tribes who came to help Deborah, but puts to shame those tribes that sat idly by and did not respond to the call to conquer the enemy (5:14-18, 23). Deborah continues the song by graphically depicting the miraculous victory (5:19-22), Sisera's death by the hand of Jael (5:24-27), and his mother's lament—intended to show the reverse of their enemies' expected outcome (5:28-30). In conclusion, Deborah asks a curse to be upon all the enemies of God, but blessings upon those who love Him.

Prayer

Lord, You still give great victories to those who trust and obey You. We expect to live victoriously today because we are humbly asking You to go before us into our battles.