

Finer Grounds

Judges and Ruth

Lesson 3: The Victory Belongs to Yahweh (Judges 4 & 5)

Before we begin I will encourage you again to read through both Judges and Ruth in their entirety this week. If you simply don't have time to do this, begin this lesson by reading Judges 4 and 5 completely through. Let's look at a couple of review questions to warm up your brain.

What are the primary themes throughout the book of Judges?

What is the cycle of the judges?

Read Judges 4:1-3

List the elements of the cycle of judges that appear in these verses.

After Ehud there was a lengthy period of 80 years rest. While that seems like a short blip of time when you are looking at historical events on a timeline, I challenge you to think of what changes have taken place in our last 80 years. Sometimes periods of peace and prosperity lead to complacency and that is what happened to Israel again and again. This account begins as many do in the book of judges "the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord."

What are some other Biblical examples of long periods of peace and prosperity that lead to complacency and eventually turning from God?

How does this happen today?

What are some precautions we can take so that the comforts of life do not hinder our dependence on God?

In these verses we are reintroduced to the iron chariots. If the Israelites had been courageous enough to follow Yahweh's directive back in Judges 1:19, they would not be plagued by them now. God will now use these iron chariots to prove His power and strength against any enemy. Iron smelting would have been a fairly new technology and the army with iron chariots, especially 900 of them, would have been one of the greatest human forces on the earth. We will see that even the greatest human power proves insignificant when matched to the amazing might of our God, Yahweh.

Read Judges 4:4-10

If I ask about Deborah, many of you without having recently read through Judges would

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probably be able to readily identify her as the only woman judge. She is the first of our Sunday school heroes in this book (unless you had a teacher like my dad who absolutely loved teaching his students the disgusting details of Eglon and Ehud). We will examine her character, but more importantly we will look at how this account illustrates the patterns set forth in the book of Judges.

What do we learn about Deborah from this passage?

What do we learn about Barak?

Often times we turn this account into one of the “women power” stories in scripture and in so doing, I believe we miss one of its major messages. God often delights in using non-ideal circumstances to make His power even more obvious. While we can cheer for Deborah and what she represents for women, take a minute to think about what her presence might indicate about the male leadership. I think that instead of being an inspiring story of a women leader, this is meant to be an indictment of the men not stepping up and because of this are contributing to the downfall of the people. God will, as He does throughout scripture, prove His strength through unlikely sources (in this case women).

What statement does Barak make in Judges 4:8?

Remember that Deborah was a prophetess delivering a direct command from Yahweh (Judges 4:4, 4:6). In his response Barak is showing lack of confidence in the Lord. He doesn’t simply show fear and anxiety here (we will see Gideon asking for reassurance without negative response), but issues a quid pro quo: he will only obey if Deborah goes with him. God will still use him, but there will be a consequence for this attitude.

According to Judges 4:9 what will happen because of Barak’s response to the command from the Lord?

Another theme that threads its way through Judges is that of personal responsibility; God uses individuals to make a huge impact on the entire nation. Sometimes we see these people making poor choices and sometimes they stand up and fight with epic bravery. Whatever the case, God uses their choices and actions to change the world.

What are some ways that you have seen God use individuals to make an enormous impact on the church, the nation or the world?

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Who are some individuals that have made a meaningful impact on your world because of their willingness to be used by God?

What are some ways you can thank those people this week?

How can you become one of these people?

Read Judges 4:11-16

Did I mention that God delights in showing His power in unexpected ways? Imagine that you are looking on at this battle. The contrast in these armies would have been stark: the wandering nomadic fighters vs. the seasoned warriors with iron chariots and most likely forged weapons. Through our human perspective, the outcome of this battle would have been fairly obvious.

Look closely at Judges 4:15. Who is really in control of this battle?

The word “routed” used in the NASB in Judges 4:15 literally means to confuse or put into motion (Brown). If you have been keeping up with your Bible marking and you are marking the sections that God acts, this passage should be one that stands out. It is reminiscent of Exodus 14:24.

We will continue to see similar accounts throughout the book of Judges.

List all of the ways Yahweh had a hand in this battle.

It would have been obvious to anyone participating in the battle and to all onlookers that something out of the ordinary was occurring here. A victory that should have been easily won is now falling apart at the seams and God has only begun to show His providence in this situation.

Read Judges 4:17-24

Now we come to the fulfillment of the statement Deborah made in Judges 4:9. When reading through Judges for the first time, it seems like a foregone conclusion that the woman Deborah is speaking about is herself, but this is not the case. God will take another opportunity to turn the situation on its head and create one more unlikely hero (or heroine as the case may be).

In your own words summarize the account of Jael and Sisera.

A tent peg to the temple. Definitely not the way I would want to go. Also, not a mess I would want to clean up after. Imagine the shock that Barak felt as he came upon this scene. No doubt he had assumed that the woman who would receive credit for the victory would be Deborah, which may have been tolerable considering her status as judge and prophetess. Now, imagine what he felt when the deed that should have fallen

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to him (the execution of the enemy's leader) was performed by a common woman. One whom we can infer based on the passage was in a household that had in some way pledged allegiance to Sisera and his army. If not he wouldn't have sought refuge and displayed trust so eagerly.

Rewrite Judges 4:23.

What theme does this summary statement support?

Because the next section is a song or a poem it is best to read it and try to digest it as one. I know it is long, but you will get a better feel for the tone and the message when read all at once. This may seem silly, but I find it helpful to read passages like this out loud, or at the very least listen to them through a dramatized audio Bible. It really makes a difference in the way your brain processes the information. Remember this would have been a celebratory speech/song. Imagine the triumphant war heroes returning and relaying this message to the people of Israel!

Read Judges 5 out loud.

What is the tone of this song?

How is God pictured in Judges 5:1-5?

Deborah and Barak make it very obvious who has made them victorious: this battle belongs to Yahweh! They do not stop here though, this is a song has a two-fold purpose, to praise God for His victory and to encourage those that stepped up in Israel's time of need.

List some of the actions and attitudes the tribes are praised for in Judges 5:12-18.

We should recognize that it is God who grants us spiritual blessings, causes church growth and pricks our hearts with His word; however, it is important to remember that He uses willing people to accomplish His purpose. It is scriptural and beneficial for us to show our thankfulness to God as well as any person who has allowed himself to be used to further God's plan.

What is one thing you can do this week to encourage someone who is using their life to further God's plan?

Which single person gets the most mention in this song? Why is that?

Jael serves as a reminder of God's use of individuals, but that is not the only part she plays. Her account shows the providence of God and how His will prevails in the most unlikely circumstances. God is always in control.

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At the end of this song we see the joy of the Israelite victory contrasted with the sorrow of Sisera's mother. Sisera would not be coming home. This would be the consequence for the enemy of God.

How does this passage (Judges 5:28-31) illustrate one of the themes of the book of Judges?

God will reward His followers and punish His enemies! I can think of no more fitting conclusion to this lesson than the way Deborah and Barak ended their song, so I will leave you with this: "Thus let all Your enemies perish, O Lord; But let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might."