

Judges 4A

- Let's meet our third judge in the book of Judges
 - This next judge is far better known than the first two we've studied
 - And perhaps the most interesting of all, this judge is a woman, Deborah
 - Given the patriarchal culture of Israel and scriptures teaching on male headship, God's choice to raise up Deborah is quite remarkable
 - So as we study her account, we'll take opportunity to consider the significance of God's choice of a woman to judge Israel
 - Furthermore, the story of Deborah is longer than the first two judges put together, spanning two chapters
 - Nevertheless, the story will still follow the familiar pattern we've learned
 - The pattern is sin, discipline, repentance, redemption
 - And then cycle repeats

[Judg. 4:1](#) Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died.

[Judg. 4:2](#) And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; and the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim.

[Judg. 4:3](#) The sons of Israel cried to the LORD; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years.

- Chapter 4 finishes the life of our second judge, Ehud and introduces the start of the next cycle
 - Ehud lived a long life and according to chapter 3 he oversaw a period of eighty years of relative obedience and peace in the land
 - In 3:30 Samuel says that the land was undisturbed
 - He means that the Lord didn't bring a disturbance into the land
 - And of course, that peace was a result of obedience to the covenant under the leadership of Ehud

- Obedience = Peace
 - When we set our minds on obeying the Lord, He brings us peace
 - He won't disturb us in the sense that He would be at work chastising us
 - This doesn't mean that there won't be trials
 - The Apostle Paul was very much in the Lord's will throughout his ministry, and yet he faced many trials
- Trials are a sign we are invading darkness and disturbing the enemy
 - But when we disobey, the Lord visits that disturbance upon us
 - And if you're wondering how you will know the difference, let me assure there is a world of difference
 - Every every child of God knows when they are suffering for disobedience, even when we don't like to confess it
 - And we will also know when we are facing persecution for the sake of Christ's name
 - In the first case, we will feel conviction and the weight of our mistakes bearing down on us
 - And in the second case, we will feel a peace that passes all understanding
- Israel has known that peace for 80 years, and then Ehud dies, and we see that sad refrain: Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord
 - We remember this means the nation went back to idol worship
 - Apparently Jewish History was not a required course in Israelite schools
 - Because they easily forget the pattern of their forefathers
 - As soon as the judge is gone, the people return to following their flesh
 - Which leads to step 2, the Lord bringing discipline to the people by means of an oppressor
 - This time the Lord raises up a man named Jabin, but this is probably not his actual name

- Another king of the same name ruled in this same area in Joshua's time
- So it's probably a title, like Pharaoh
- Jabin is a Canaanite king ruling over the Canaanites from Hazor, a town in the north of Israel
 - We are also introduced to the commander of Jabin's army, Sisera, who lives a few miles away in the town Harosheth-hagoyim
 - The source of the Canaanites' strength in the north was there numerous chariots
 - The region they controlled was the relatively flat lands of the Jezreel Valley, where chariots were unbeatable war weapons
 - Two men shooting arrows while riding a chariot behind a fast horse could inflict tremendous damage on opposing troops
 - And Josephus reports that Jabin had 300,000 foot soldiers, 10,000 horsemen and 3,000 chariots
- The Biblical text counts 900 iron chariots among all that Jabin had
 - Interestingly, the number 9 is the number for judgment
 - So the chariots were a representation of God's judgment against the people of Israel
 - With these chariots, Jabin oppressed the people of Israel for twenty years
 - We notice the period of oppression has risen again from 18 to 20 years
- So in v.3 the nation has begun to repent and cry out for the Lord to rescue them
 - And once again the endless faithfulness and mercy of the Lord is evident
 - He responds by raising up another judge to fight the enemy and free the people

[Judg. 4:4](#) Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time.

[Judg. 4:5](#) She used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment.

[Judg. 4:6](#) Now she sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali, and said to him, "Behold, the LORD, the God of Israel, has commanded, 'Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun.

[Judg. 4:7](#) 'I will draw out to you Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his many troops to the river Kishon, and I will give him into your hand.'"

- And now we're introduced to Deborah, a prophetess
 - In the Bible, we find a number of women called prophetesses
 - Besides Deborah, we have Moses' wife, Miriam
 - Isaiah's wife
 - Huldah, the prophetess to King Josiah
 - In the NT, we hear of Anna and Philip's four daughters
 - Besides being female, Deborah is different than the first two judges in that she is not a military leader
 - She is ruling as judge even as the people of Israel are being oppressed in the north
 - Apparently, the people of Israel did not possess the military might or confidence to rise up against Jabin's forces
 - But in the south, Deborah was already at work judging the people in a civic capacity
 - Her name means "bee" which is a reflection of her sting and sweet victory
 - Her name is similar in Hebrew to the word for "speak" and "word"
 - That suggests her role in speaking truth and confidence to the people of Israel, inspiring the people on to victory
- What can we say about God using a woman to judge the people of Israel?
 - First, remember that a judge wasn't the king or leader of all people

- Primarily, they acted as a prophet or spokesperson for the Lord
- They didn't supplant leadership in the tribes or homes
- Secondly, they enforced the Law by calling the people to follow the Lord obediently, not by forcing that outcome
 - They weren't always military leaders, as we see with Deborah
 - They didn't depend on the leaders in homes and within the tribes to heed the word of the Lord
- Finally, this is a period of theocracy in Israel, when God ruled directly over the people
 - Since God had the reigns of power, no human leader possessed authority over all the people – no man, no woman
 - That awaits for the time of kings
- Nevertheless, the story of Deborah will feature women doing the right thing while men are either AWOL, reluctant to act or downright ungodly
 - It's a commentary on the state of Israel culture that the women are stepping up to compel righteousness among the people
 - While the men are rarely seen to take charge in that same way
- Certainly both men and women have a role in promoting and enforcing godliness among God's people
 - But when that burden falls disproportionately upon women, it's a sign that things aren't going well in the culture
 - Isaiah insults Israel's enemies by calling them children and saying women rule over them
 - For a patriarchal culture, though, it was strong indictment that women were the only ones assuming the reigns of leadership
 - And there is a similar commentary present in this chapter
- Meanwhile, Deborah is now a prophetess living in the hill country of Ephraim, speaking God's instructions to the people
 - And when the time came to rescue Israel, the Lord spoke through Deborah
 - Deborah calls a military man to lead Israel into battle

- His name is Barak
- His family comes from the far north, the territory of Naphtali
- So he had a knowledge of Canaanite territory where the battle will be fought
- Barak means “lightening,” which is a prophetic indication of his performance in battle
 - When Barak meets Deborah, he’s told the time has come for the Lord to deliver Israel
 - Barak must enlist 10,000 men from Zebulun and Naphtali to fight the commander of the army to the Kishon river
 - These were the two northern tribes that occupied the lands under the control of King Jaban
 - The Lord was insisting that these tribes do their duty to defeat the forces in the land
- You remember that when the Israelites entered the land under Joshua, they were commanded to drive out the Canaanites in the land
 - Under Joshua’s leadership, the people were successful at establishing a beach head
 - And then at Joshua’s death, the tribes were told to go out to their assigned territories and complete the conquest
 - But as we read, the tribes failed to follow the Lord’s command
 - And instead, they settled in next to the Canaanites
 - Then the Lord declared He would not drive the Canaanites out quickly
 - Instead, He declared that the Canaanites would be a thorn in Israel’s side
 - Nevertheless, the command to drive out the Canaanites still stands
 - So each time the Lord intervenes to rescue the people, He calls another tribe to do its duty in battle
 - This time He calls Zebulun and Naphtali to do what they should have done in the beginning

- To drive out the Canaanites
- Take note that the Lord is promising to win the battle for Barak
 - Barak has received assurances from the prophetess of the Lord that he will win a victory
 - Deborah says “go” because the Lord commanded
 - And then the Lord says “I” will draw out the enemy and “I” will give him into your hands
 - You can’t get more assurance than that
 - Barak knows he will win the battle because the Lord has declared it will happen
 - Now you would think that would be enough for Barak

Judg. 4:8 Then Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.”

Judg. 4:9 She said, “I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the honor shall not be yours on the journey that you are about to take, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman.” Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh.

- But he turns to Deborah and says he won’t do what he’s told unless she accompanies him
- If we want to be generous, we could give Barak the benefit of the doubt and assume he just wanted Deborah’s prophetic gift to accompany him
- If the Lord had more to say to him, he would be able to receive it
- But that’s not the reason
 - Barak doesn’t need to hear more from the Lord
 - And even if more information was required, he could be sure the Lord would find a way to get a message to him with or without Deborah
- The real reason Barak insists on Deborah is because he lacks the faith in the power of God’s word
 - He say Deborah as his insurance policy in case the word of the Lord failed

- Barak knows that Deborah is a prophetess
- And he assumes that God would not fail Deborah or allow her to become a victim of the enemy
- So that if Deborah is present at his side, the Lord would be forced to bring victory lest Deborah be harmed
- This is a serious lack of trust in the Lord
 - Barak fears the Lord will throw him under a bus during battle
 - But he believes the Lord will come through for Deborah
 - In a very real sense, Deborah is Barak's idol
- And in this account, Barak becomes a poster child for what was wrong in Jewish society as a whole during this time
 - Women were exhibiting courage and following the Lord's word, as they should
 - While the men were spiritual wimps
 - The men of Israel weren't listen, they weren't obeying, not even the ones anointed by God and given personal assurances
 - They were too timid
 - They doubted in the word of the Lord
 - This is the third cycle of our Judges pattern
 - Like before, Israel sinned, they were punished, they cried out, and now it's time to restore them
 - But can you see the deteriorating condition of Israel?
 - Unlike the first two cycles, Jewish society has become so weak spiritually that it's hard to find someone to answer God's call to free the people
 - With Ehud, Israel had an unlikely hero taking great risks
 - But now we have the opposite situation
 - A mighty warrior with ten thousand men at his disposal needs convincing to go to battle

- In fact, unless a woman accompanies him into battle, he refuses to go
- For a patriarchal culture, there can be few greater indictments than this
- When those appointed by God to lead abdicate that responsibility, the people are in trouble
 - Men and woman have roles in God's economy, and neither role is dispensable
 - But when men go AWOL, bad things happen
 - The men of Israel have forgotten what it means to follow the Lord and lead His people
 - They aren't willing to trust in His word
 - And they can't find the strength obey
 - And this is not to say that women can't be leaders or shouldn't be a source of spiritual strength among God's people
 - On the contrary, spiritually strong women are a great blessing to God's people
 - We certainly don't want the women of God to be weaker
 - We want the men of God to match and exceed spiritual strength of the women while performing their duties as spiritual leaders
 - When men shrink back from this responsibility, forcing women to step forward to fill that gap, it's an indictment on the culture as a whole
- Besides being a litmus test for a spiritual community, this pattern is also a barometer for our personal sanctification
 - What saint hasn't hesitated to obey the word of the Lord because of fear or doubt or selfishness?
 - Like Barak, who among us hasn't made excuses for why we can't obey the word we know?
 - We read the word, or at least we should, so we know what the Lord has commanded

- And even if we're not the world's best Bible student, we understand the basics well enough
 - Keep yourself from sin, love the Lord, discipline the body, make disciples, etc.
- And yet how often do we still act contrary to what it says?
- How many times have we refused to rise up and change something in our life
- How often do we just say no
- Maybe we've even offered Barak's excuse?
 - We say "yes" but we put conditions on our obedience
 - We tell the Lord we need guarantees or crutches
 - We tell ourselves that we are weak or that we need to be given more time to comply
 - "I know I need to break that habit or forgive that person, but I can't be expected to do this on my own..."
 - Or "I'll make that change, Lord, but you have to give me time..."
 - Or "I know what the word says, but my situation is different..."
 - Or even, "I'm going to do it my way and who cares what the Lord thinks"
- How did the Lord respond to Barak's excuses?
 - He said "go" meaning don't hesitate
 - And He said "today" because He decided the timing
 - So our excuses count for nothing; they are simply disobedience
- This is the Lord's standard for obedience
 - The word of God tells us what to do and it calls us to do it today
 - Obedience isn't saying "maybe", or "later" or "yes, but only my way"
 - Obedience is living according to God's word

- It's trusting that the Lord's commands are better than our own ideas because He knows the future and we don't
- Ask yourself where in your life are you offering excuses or delays instead of simply obeying what the Lord has said
 - Perhaps you're saying I want to obey but I'm weak in the flesh?
 - Well, join the club
 - Barak couldn't win his battle in his own strength either
 - That's why God didn't send Barak to the fight expecting him to win the battle on his own
 - The Lord said "I will give you enemy into you hand"
- And the same is true for you and me
 - The Lord knows our weaknesses
 - He knows it's hard to say no to ourselves, to forgive another person, to discipline our flesh, to make sacrifices
 - To face persecution, to forgo the world's pleasures
- These things are hard...in fact, they are impossible, but as Jesus said

Luke 18:27 But He said, "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God."

- Commit to obedience and watch the Lord show up when you need Him to deliver you
- Your walk won't necessarily be easy...but if the Lord commanded it, then success is assured
- So look how the Deborah responds
 - Deborah agrees to go up, probably just to ensure Barak follows through
 - But she isn't happy to do it
 - She's not pleased by Barak's unwillingness to trust the word of the Lord which she has spoken
 - So she gives him another word, a rebuke as a result of his failure to act in faith

- Deborah says that when Israel does win this victory, it won't come at his hands but at the hands of a woman
 - At first, it may seem as if Deborah is referring to herself
 - But as we'll see later in the chapter, she's speaking of another woman
 - The Lord will use a unlikely woman to deliver the victory because Barak was unwilling to trust in His word
- Consider what we're witnessing
 - God used a woman to call a man to serve in battle
 - And that man, an accomplished warfighter, won't proceed unless a woman goes with him
 - And so to mock his lack of faith, God proclaims that the victory will be won by a woman
 - Barak won't get any honor for the end result
- The next time you're contemplating whether to obey the Lord's call, give some thought to this
 - The Lord is going to see His purposes met
 - And so either we can join with Him, receiving honor and blessing for that obedience
 - Or we can watch as others serve Him in our place, receiving that honor instead
 - And this truth applies even in struggles of personal sin
 - When we don't say no to ourselves and yes to the Lord's commands, we potentially disqualify ourselves from His service
 - And in our place, the Lord will raise up others
 - Let's be people who love the Lord so much that we make obedience our greatest goal
 - Let's not be a generation where our men are afraid to lead
 - And let's not be so shortsighted that we believe the lie that getting our way now is better than earning the Lord's pleasure in eternity