

WOMEN'S SUMMER BOOST: WEEK 1

1.1. Deborah and Jael

In Judges, we read a puzzling story. There is no king yet, and no prophet- leader like Moses or Joshua. It is a confusing time, best described as “and everyone did as they saw fit” – most of the time a terrible idea.

The Israelites end up being heavily oppressed by king Jabin of Canaan, with his unbeatable commander Sisera. They have no means to defend themselves with. In this time, people seek to settle their disputes with a prophetess judge, named Deborah (Judges 4-5). Deborah hears from God that He wants to give the army of Sisera into the hands of Israel. But Israel's commander Barak refuses to go up unless Deborah goes with him.

Deborah rides out with him. Let's not miss this beautiful detail of what she says first:

⁸ *Barak said to her, “If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go.”*

⁹ *“Certainly I will go with you,” said Deborah. “But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.” So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh.*

This is important, because Barak's words sound similar to Moses' words to God: “Unless you go with us, do not make us move up from here”. However, Deborah is not God, and she makes clear she has no intention of taking that place. She is a true mother to the nation, and godly leaders point people to God, not to themselves. They treat the person in front of them like the mature Godly (wo)man they see in them. They have the hard conversations, they sharpen like iron sharpens iron.

This stand of Barak will have consequences. But God will not be stopped.

Barak's army overpowers the enemy army indeed, but Sisera gets away. And then something surprising happens: we have a Kenite woman jumping to the rescue.

Judges 4:18 Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, “Come, my lord, come right in. Don't be afraid.” So he entered her tent, and she covered him with a blanket.

¹⁹ *“I'm thirsty,” he said. “Please give me some water.” She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up.*

²⁰ *“Stand in the doorway of the tent,” he told her. “If someone comes by and asks you, ‘Is anyone in there?’ say ‘No.’”*

²¹ *But Jael, Heber's wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died.*

Jaels house was at peace with king Jabin, so we can't underestimate her life threatening expression of loyalty to Yahweh, the God of Israël.

Now if we read a bit further, it becomes clear what God thinks about this:

Judges 5:24 "Most blessed of women be Jael,

*the wife of Heber the Kenite,
most blessed of tent-dwelling women.*

²⁵ *He asked for water, and she gave him milk;
in a bowl fit for nobles she brought him curdled milk.*

²⁶ *Her hand reached for the tent peg,
her right hand for the workman's hammer.*

*She struck Sisera, she crushed his head,
she shattered and pierced his temple.*

²⁷ *At her feet he sank,
he fell; there he lay.*

*At her feet he sank, he fell;
where he sank, there he fell—dead.*

Deborah also sings of herself. She does not take away the glory of God. No, she just gives us an extended evaluation of who did what was right, and who failed to do so. The tribes are evaluated based on who showed up to help. Princes taking the lead and people volunteering for service are a reason to praise God. In contrast, right before the song praises Jael, it curses Meroz:

judges 5:23 'Curse Meroz,' said the angel of the Lord.

*'Curse its people bitterly,
because they did not come to help the Lord,
to help the Lord against the mighty.'*

Yet of herself, Deborah sings in this prophetic song that people in Israel would not fight until she arose. That she was a mother in Israel. The people of Issachar who were with her, were praised for that. And again, not disconnected to the reader in those days, the chapter closes with a blessing of approval: after this terrible oppression was ended by this courageous obedience and leadership, we read:

Judges 5:31 "So may all your enemies perish, Lord!

*But may all who love you be like the sun
when it rises in its strength."*

Then the land had peace forty years.

I have often heard it say that Deborah was only called to lead because Barak refused. We have to let the Word teach us, not cultures or man made doctrines. Any teaching of man that does not align with the Word of God, no matter how trusted we are with it, has to leave and make room for the Truth. Deborah was a prophetess and judge leading long before God spoke about defeating Sisera. God could have spoken to a man of the many princes mentioned. Barak knew of her walk with God, her wisdom

in leading as a judge and her obedience. He knew God had chosen her to reveal this prophecy to. That was exactly the reason he did not want to go without her.

Deborah, a woman who leads like a Mother-Warrior.

Jaël, a woman who does not hesitate to strike because she doesn't hesitate where her loyalty lies.

The women God wanted us to know and read about for centuries may differ just a bit from the women the culture has presented to us...

Word of encouragement:

The time of Judges 4-5 can best be described as a time of oppression and depression: we read in just one chapter that they were heavily and cruelly oppressed by their enemy, but also that they have disputes amongst each other that they can't manage to settle without a judge. It's like being trapped in the fog, it just looks hopeless, endless and they seem helpless.

That's usually when His light shines the brightest. One day, I was lead to look up the meaning of the names of our main characters. They are incredibly prophetic, and also very encouraging to us today:

Jael means mountain goat. No matter how thick the fog gets, mountain goats are steady climbers. They rise above the fog and see clearly what needs to be done and where to go. God calls us to be focused, to look up from our circumstances to Him.

Barak means lightning. Unaffected and unintimidated by fog, lightning will strike when it will strike. No amount of fog can scare away lightning. God will not be stopped when He sets out to do what He will do.

Deborah is the one that surprised me the most. It means "honey bee". Normally, insects can not fly through fog, but it just so happens that this specific one can. Honey bees have hydrophobic wings, enabling them to fly even through thick fog. God does not need us to see everything clearly before He sends us out. He just wants us to open our wings in obedience, and in doing so, we will find out we are equipped for the task.

Prayer pause

What do you want to retain from this passage on Deborah and Jael?

What caught your attention to chew on more? Take time to do so.

Pray about what spoke to you.