

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 4A

JUDGES

CHAPTER 4

Judges 4:8, “*And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go.*”

INTRODUCTION

Someone has remarked that there are three kinds of people in the world. There are those who watch what is happening. Then there are those who do not know what is happening. And the third are those who make things happen. Of the third kind, the divine writer of Judges in Chapter 4 gives a true account of an Israeli woman named Deborah. She was one of the women in the Bible—Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20), Esther (Esther 4:10-17), Anna (Luke 2:36-38) and Priscilla (Acts 18:26) — who assumed leadership roles in Israel. However, Deborah was unique because she functioned both as a prophetess and a judge of Israel, whereas the other

women did not have a dual role. This dual role of Deborah was indeed unexpected as it was God’s choice and calling of a woman to be both His spokesman and judge. In a patriarchal society like Israel, it is very rare that a woman was made a prophetess and a judge.

The children of Israel again compromised and backslid into apostasy, and the cycle of rebellion, oppression, repentance and restoration happened again.

OUTLINE

1. Sin again (4:1-3),
2. Deborah calls to arms (4:4-9),
3. Barak defeats Sisera (4:10-17),
4. Jael kills Sisera (4:18-24).

COMMENTARY

Sin Again – 4:1-3

The children of Israel sinned *again* before the LORD when Ehud died. This strongly implies that when Ehud died, the children of Israel gradually went back to their old sinful ways. They *chose new gods*, meaning that they worshipped the gods of the Canaanites and turned their backs from the LORD their God (5:8). When there is a decline of spiritual leadership, the people will turn to other things to fill that spiritual vacuum. Israel sinned and the LORD *sold them* to Jabin, the king of the Canaanites, who reigned in Hazor.

Hazor was a city in the north of the Land. It had been conquered by Joshua.¹ But apparently the Canaanites returned and rebuilt the city, which had been destroyed.

At that time, the name of the king was “Jabin”. In this case, the name “Jabin” was not the personal name of the king but rather a title like that of “Pharaoh” the king of the Egyptians. Jabin’s army general was Sisera who lived in Harosheth of the Gentiles, a city which was near Hazor in Galilee. Sisera had war-machines—chariots of iron, nine hundred of them. In those days, such war-machines were considered powerful and formidable, and they contributed to the invincibility of the army of general Sisera. Israel on the other hand had no such chariots of iron. She was without a wise and strong “judge;” who could lead the nation. Sisera, therefore, severely oppressed the children of Israel for twenty long years.

God was not malevolent in allowing the enemy to subjugate His people. On the contrary, God was really benevolent for He desired that His people should repent and return to Him; obey and receive His blessings. The oppression was so great that the children of Israel could not take the terrible suffering any longer. So, they cried to the LORD for deliverance.

¹ Joshua 11:10 And Joshua at that time turned back, and took Hazor, and smote the king thereof with the sword: for Hazor beforetime was the head of all those kingdoms.

The LORD heard their cry, and being ever merciful and forgiving when the people confessed and made a commitment to repent of their sins, the LORD responded accordingly.

Deborah Calls to Arms – 4:4-9

The LORD chose and called Deborah (meaning “honeybee”) to be His prophetess. Little is given about her background except that she was the wife of Lapidoth. This means that apart from being a prophetess — a spokesman for God, she was also a wife and mother. Furthermore, she discharged the work of a judge — one who hears and settles the problems and disputes of the people. She lived under *the palm tree of Deborah* located between Ramah and Bethel in the hilly country of Ephraim. This place was central and easily accessible by most of the Israelites.

The children of Israel would come to her on a personal and daily basis to settle their disputes and accept her judgements. Deborah was indeed an exceptional woman with special endowments of godly wisdom and leadership skills and knowledge. For some time, she had been serving her people Israel. The time was now right, and God raised her up and empowered her to be Israel’s deliverer and judge. She herself, as *a mother of Israel* (5:7b), had assessed the desperate circumstances of her people, and was determined to arouse

her people to conquer the enemy, which was God's plan initially.

Deborah realised that Israel needed to assemble an army of soldiers and a military captain to lead the army. In this regard, Deborah showed her wisdom and leadership quality in that she knew her calling. She was a warrior. She sent and called for Barak. Barak obviously had shown to be a warrior, the son of Abinoam, who lived in Kedesh-naphtali, a city on the border of Naphtali and Issachar which was near the Sea of Galilee. In sending for Barak, Deborah gave him the commandment of the LORD.

Apparently, this was a direct divine revelation to the prophetess, and the command to Barak was that he should muster ten thousand men chosen from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun. He should assemble them on Mount Tabor. Then the LORD would cause Sisera to lead his army towards the river Kishon in the plains of Megiddo. Barak and his ten thousand soldiers would then descend on the enemy, and the LORD would deliver the enemy into his hand (4:6, 7). This was not Deborah's own idea but the strategy was given by the LORD Himself through her.

Barak conditionally accepted the commission which had been told to him by the LORD through Deborah. He required Deborah's presence with him in the battle field. He would not

accept the assignment if Deborah rejected his request. Deborah agreed to accompany him and predicted that the LORD would *sell Sisera into the hand of a woman* (4:9). This means that the honour of killing Sisera would be accorded to a woman.

The condition of Barak to include Deborah was not uncommon in biblical times. She was a messenger from the LORD. The inclusion of Deborah in battle would mean that the LORD would be with them. As Israel was a spiritual nation and that Deborah herself had said that the LORD commanded Barak to deliver Israel from this present bondage, she has to come or else wherein is the proof and sincerity of her message? It was not cowardice on Barak's part but a spiritual assurance and conviction on his part that probably prompted the request.

Barak Defeats Sisera – 4:10-17

Accordingly, Barak recruited ten thousand men from the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali. This was a localized encounter and did not involve the entire nation. Nevertheless, with the LORD'S help and His word the victory over the enemy was assured. The men of Israel led by Barak assembled on Mount Tabor as the LORD had directed them. The LORD would then draw Sisera and his army of nine hundred chariots of iron to the Kishon valley where the river Kishon

meanders on the plain of Megiddo. Now, Heber, the Kenite, who had defected to the enemy informed Sisera where Israel would be pitching their tents in preparation for the battle (4:11). This information caused Sisera to move his armies to the valley below mount Tabor.

This movement precisely fitted into the strategy, which had been told by Deborah to Barak. Israel was outnumbered and out-manned by the enemy. The strategy given by the LORD gave the Israelites' army an advantage over Sisera and his army. The Israelites were on higher ground on Mount Tabor, and it was easier to move down the slopes of the mountain and to attack the enemy. The LORD was on the side of His people, and that was enough for Israel to defeat her enemies.

When Sisera gathered all his nine hundred chariots of iron together and his men, Deborah gave the first "shot". She called out to Barak to rise up and attack reassuring him with the promise of the LORD that He would defeat Sisera and that the LORD would go before him (4:14). The LORD discomfited Sisera's nine hundred chariots of iron. It happened that precisely at the right moment, there was a great downpour of rain on the valley causing the river Kishon to swell making the ground soft and difficult (a quagmire) to maneuver the chariots (5:20-22). The chariots became stuck in the muddy ground

and rendered useless. This caused disarray amongst Sisera's soldiers and opened the way for the Israelites to descend on them and destroy them. The battle was won. On seeing that he was losing the battle, Sisera got down from his chariot and fled for his life on foot! He made his way to Heber's tent, where he could expect protection and refuge, because Heber, the Kenite, was an ally of Jabin, the king of Sisera (4:11).

Jael Kills Sisera – 4:18-24

In his flight for his life, Sisera ran to the nearest and safest place he knew, the home of Heber, his informer and supporter. On seeing Sisera, Jael, Heber's wife, went out to meet him. She extended to him refuge in her house and reassured him. Sisera, who was exhausted, readily accepted Jael's hospitality. When Sisera entered her tent, Jael quickly got him to rest on a bed, covered him with a blanket thus hiding him. She even showed exceptional kindness to the army general bringing a little water for him to drink. In addition she opened a bottle of milk and gave it to him, and left him to rest. Sisera made sure he was absolutely safe by asking Jael to guard the entrance of the tent and to stop any Israelite soldier from entering. If any Israelite soldier were to ask for him, she should deny that he was present in the tent. Sisera fell *fast asleep* (4:21). Then Jael took a tent peg and a hammer. She drove the tent peg right through Sisera's temples

with the hammer until it was embedded into the ground. Sisera died instantly. This indicates that Jael was not in tune with her husband in supporting Jabin and Sisera. She was still loyal to the Israelites and to the LORD God of Israel whom her forefathers had worshipped and served. Deborah in her song praised Jael, and blessed her above all other women in Israel. She was praised because of her loyalty to the LORD God and to the nation Israel. She was the LORD'S instrument for fulfilling His purpose.

Shortly after, Barak came to learn of Sisera's death. He was too late to execute the death blow onto Sisera himself. That honour was Jael's. Barak surely remembered Deborah's prediction that the honour of killing Sisera would be given to a woman. The children of Israel prospered after that. They enjoyed rest and peace in the Land for forty years (5:31)

PRACTICAL VALUE

Deborah set a good example of courage for all of us. She was chosen by the LORD to deliver an Israel in bondage. She was faithful in her duty and did not flinch. She carried out her role to the letter in obedience to the LORD's command. She called Barak because he was a military leader. Together they succeeded in delivering Israel from bondage. United

leadership is the key to success against the evil one. When leaders fight, the people under their care suffer. There is great victory when every leader knows his respective roles and carried them out according to the Word of God for God's glory.

When the children of God forget their Father in Heaven and the Lord Jesus Christ their Redeemer, their spiritual life will surely take a downward slide. They will start by losing their appetite for His Word. They soon turn to other "gods", (not necessarily idols of metal, stone or wood for money and materialism are just as deadly as idols of gold or silver), and compromise their godly values for the temporal attractions of the world. They will be more interested in earthly things than heavenly. They forget that they are saved to live for God on earth and ultimately to be with Him in the New Heaven and the New Earth.

However, when such a person is truly a born-again child of God, the Father in heaven will surely chastise him as He has promised in His holy Word. The chastisement may be severe which he will suffer for the moment but it is all for his own good. God is righteous and just to forgive our sins when we confess and repent. God has shown in the accounts in Judges that He is ever merciful and gracious; He will hear our cries of repentance and act to restore us back to Him. AMEN

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Judges 4:1-3;
Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 15-16.

TUESDAY: Judges 4:4-9; 2 Kings 5:1-3,
Esther 4:12-17.

WEDNESDAY: Judges 4:10-17;
Hebrews 11:32, 33.

THURSDAY: Judges 4:18-24; 2
Corinthians 4:7; Zechariah 4:6.

FRIDAY: Judges 4:1-24 .

Discussion Questions

1. Why the emphasis on the chariots by the divine writer?

2. What was the recurring pattern in Israel's history at this time?

3. How did Barak show his faith?

4. Why do you think Barak was unwilling to undertake the campaign without Deborah?

5. Was this a wrestling against flesh and blood or against principalities in high places?

6. Would you say that Jael was ruthless when she killed Sisera with a tent peg or was she a faithful women?

7. Barak would not to go to war against Jabin unless Deborah the prophetess went with him. Both of them had to make very important decisions. How would you explain the decisions made by both of them?
