

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL

the PROMISED *land*

GOD THE JUDGE

Deborah, God's Woman of Wisdom

As we think of earthly judges, let's be ever mindful of our Heavenly Judge. Hannah was the mother of Samuel, one of the greatest prophets and the last judge of Israel. She prayed in **1 Samuel 2:10 (ESV)** ¹⁰ *The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them he will thunder in heaven. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed.*” Hannah recognized that the promised Messiah who was still to come would be the Judge of all the earth!

It is said that about 200 years ago, the tomb of the great conqueror Charlemagne was opened. The sight the laborers saw was startling. There was his body in a sitting position, clothed in the royal garments of a king, with a scepter in his bony right hand. On his knee lay an opened Bible. His cold, lifeless finger was pointing to **Mark 8:36 (ESV)** ³⁶ *For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?*

Like Hannah, the most important thing we can do is put the Lord first in our life. Without the Lord, we are destined to stand before Jesus, our Judge at the Great White Throne Judgment. **Revelation 20:11-12 (ESV)** ¹¹ *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.* ¹² *And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.*

In order to escape the Great White Throne Judgment, there is something we must do. **Romans 10:9 (ESV)** ⁹ *because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* The Judge of all the earth has made of escape for those who put our trust in Him. Our trust is evidenced through our faith.

Faith leads us to use our gifts in service to God.

Read Judges 4:1-7 (ESV) ¹ *And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD after Ehud died.* ² *And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera...* ³ *Then the people of Israel cried out to the LORD for help, for he had 900 chariots of iron and he oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for twenty years.* ⁴ *Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time.* ⁵ *She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment.* ⁶ *She sent and summoned Barak... and said to him, “Has not the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you, ‘Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun.’”* ⁷ *And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand?”*

God raised up a courageous woman named Deborah to be the fourth judge in the land. This was an act of grace, but it was also an act of humiliation for the Jews since they lived in a society that wanted only male leadership. For God to give His people a woman judge was to treat them like little children, which is exactly what they were when it came to spiritual things. The selection of Deborah may also indicate that, at that time, there were no men willing and able to do the job. We read that she sat under the palm tree and the people came to her. The palm tree typifies the spiritual prosperity of the believer. The Bible says in ***Psalm 92:12 (ESV)***¹² *The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.* Deborah's life of service displayed her spiritual prosperity.

Deborah, like many women today, was "holding down" two jobs. Even before the military victory over the Canaanites, she was busy "judging" Israel. A judge settled disputes as we read Deborah did in verse 5 and often held executive, legislative, and military authority. We realize Deborah's authority as she "sends for" Barak, and he comes. It is only when Barak arrives that we see Deborah employed in her "second job." Her work as prophetess was certainly not secondary in her life. Deborah in her role as prophetess was God's spokesperson to deliver His messages to the Israelites. In this situation, Deborah revealed the Lord's will to Barak. Let's read Barak's response to God's calling.

Read Judges 4:8 (ESV)⁸ *Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go."*

Barak is very hesitant and doubtful. Militarily, he is out-manned, out-gunned, out-positioned, and outnumbered and he knows the enemy has 900 chariots! And ***Judges 5:8*** reveals, the Israelites did not even have shields or spears. They had certainly lost the 'clout' they had under Joshua's leadership.

Iron chariots had become the tanks of the ancient world. Pulled by one or two horses these were the most feared and powerful weapons of the day. Most of Palestine was not suitable for chariot warfare because of its high hills and deep ravines. It would not be until much later – the times of King David and King Solomon that the Israelites would develop a chariot army.

Barak knew that to attack an enemy that had chariots on a flat plain would be suicide if you were on foot. Knives protruded from the wheels of the chariots which could mow the foot soldiers down. The odds seemed hopeless and death looked certain. Militarily, it looked like a no-win situation.

Barak who eventually will have his name listed among the heroes of faith in ***Hebrews 11***, wanted Deborah on the battlefield with him. Some believe that Barak's request to be accompanied by Deborah was a plea for the presence of God to go with him. To Barak, the presence of God would be ensured by the presence of the LORD's woman Deborah. Let's read Deborah's response.

Read Judges 4:9 (ESV)⁹ *And she said, "I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh.*

Deborah promised to go with Barak because she understood that he and the people needed her spiritual support but at the same time she rebuked him for needing such reassurance. From this biblical example, I am reminded that we all have different roles of leadership. In this situation, God called Barak to be the one to fight the actual battle not Deborah. However, at least in this one biblical instance, it was literally the woman's calling to tell the man what he needed to do! When we read Deborah's comment that the enemy leader would fall by the hand of a woman, we might first assume that Deborah was making a reference to herself. We will see a little later that was not the case.

Faith leads us to be courageous in facing impossible odds.

Judges 4:12-16 (ESV) ¹² When Sisera was told that Barak ... had gone up to Mount Tabor, ¹³ Sisera called out all his chariots, 900 chariots of iron, and all the men who were with him.... ¹⁴ And Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the LORD go out before you?" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him. ¹⁵ And the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword. And Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot. ¹⁶ And Barak pursued the chariots and the army...and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left.

Remember those iron chariots that at first seemed so fearsome? It turns out they would not be so powerful in mud! From the praise song of Deborah and Barak recorded in **Judges 5**, we discover an interesting fact which a nonbeliever might attribute to coincidence. Because of their spiritual insight, Deborah and Barak recognized the truth. It was God's intervention. **Judges 5:4 (ESV)** ⁴ "LORD, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens dropped, yes, the clouds dropped water. Time of this battle was not the rainy season. However, it rained so hard that the glorious iron chariots of man got stuck in the mud. This is not the first time Almighty God harnessed nature to win a battle and it won't be the last! An interesting side note is that these enemies of Israel worshipped Baal – the storm god. When the rain pours down around us, it is great comfort knowing in heart that our God – our Creator is in control of the storms of our lives.

This battle between the armies of Barak and Sisera occurred in the Valley of Jezreel. Military leaders have called this area one of the greatest battlefields in the world. Mount Tabor commands the northwest section of the Jezreel Plain, and lies at the boundary of the lands of the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun. Gideon fought the Midianites in the Valley of Jezreel. (**Judges 6-7**). King Saul was slain by the Philistines in the Valley of Jezreel (**2 Samuel 4**). Jehu and King Josiah also fought there. Napoleon fought in this valley. General Allenby fought in the Valley of Jezreel during World War I. This area is a perfect battlefield. It is a flat plain fourteen miles wide by twenty miles in length. The most famous battle the world will ever know will be fought here someday. It will be the Mother of All Battles. The Valley of Jezreel is also known by the name Armageddon. The people and events of this chapter are a reminder of this battle to come.

Our focal passage did not include the story of the "one who got away" but it is just too interesting to leave out!

Read Judges 4:17-22 (ESV) ¹⁷ *But Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite... ¹⁸ And Jael came out to meet Sisera and said to him, “Turn aside, my lord; turn aside to me; do not be afraid.” So he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. ¹⁹ And he said to her, “Please give me a little water to drink....” So she opened a skin of milk and gave him a drink and covered him. ²⁰ And he said to her, “Stand at the opening of the tent, and if any man comes and asks you, ‘Is anyone here?’ say, ‘No.’” ²¹ But Jael the wife of Heber took a tent peg, and took a hammer in her hand. Then she went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple until it went down into the ground while he was lying fast asleep from weariness. So he died. ²² And behold, as Barak was pursuing Sisera, Jael went out to meet him and said to him, “Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.” So he went in to her tent, and there lay Sisera dead, with the tent peg in his temple.*

The Kenites were blacksmiths or metal workers who lived like gypsies traveling around the ancient world. They were distant relatives of the Israelites through Moses. It would seem from **Judges 4:11-12** that Jael’s husband, Heber, was the one who told Sisera that Barak and his men had gone to Mount Tabor. Whether or not, this was a betrayal of the Israelites or Heber was a part of Barak’s military strategy, we are not told. However, it is clear that Heber’s wife, Jael stood with the LORD’s army! As Barak looked at Sisera’s head fastened to the floor tent with a big nail placed there by Jael, undoubtedly the words of Deborah were ringing in his ears. Anyone who thinks that the Bible is dull and uninteresting obviously has never read it!

Faith leads us to give all glory to God for working through us.

Judges 5:1-9 (ESV) ¹ *Then sang Deborah and Barak ... on that day: ² “That the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the LORD! ³ “Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the LORD I will sing; I will make melody to the LORD, the God of Israel. ⁴ “LORD, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens dropped, yes, the clouds dropped water. ⁵ The mountains quaked before the LORD, even Sinai before the LORD, the God of Israel....⁷ The villagers ceased in Israel; they ceased to be until I arose; I, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel...⁹ ... Bless the LORD. ¹⁰ “Tell of it, you who ride on white donkeys, you who sit on rich carpets and you who walk by the way. ¹¹ To the sound of musicians at the watering places, there they repeat the righteous triumphs of the LORD, the righteous triumphs of his villagers in Israel. “Then down to the gates marched the people of the LORD.*

When they wanted to celebrate special occasions, the Jewish people often expressed themselves in song; so the writer shifts from narrative to song and in the process more details of the battle are revealed. Future generations might forget what the history book said, but they were not likely to forget a festive song. **Psalm 28:7 (ESV)** ⁷ *The LORD is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.*