

VI. Biblical Biographies from the Bible *Biblical Biographies: Who? Why? How?*

“Portrait #5: Deborah”

Judges 4, 5

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In the Word of God we have this glorious narrative of the Triune God as revealed in the preeminence of Christ our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer and in His Word He has raised up men and women but as you study the Word you begin to see the people who actually provide the sinew of the narrative around those who are playing those crucial roles in His glory. In fact, Howard Hendricks says there are 367 biographical sketches in the Bible and only 49 finish strong, but even those who finished strong didn't finish perfectly. Those who did not finish strong or even did not know the Lord are extensively covered in His Word and there are lessons there to be learned. I know there are lessons to be learned from these biographical sketches in the Bible because the Bible says that all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable. So God has them in His Word for us to profit for doctrine, reproof, correction and training in righteousness.

I believe there are three ways we can profit from these Biblical biographies whether they are leading men and women or the supporting cast. One of the ways we profit is we can see what God's grace did in their life. When we see how they blessed others and the Lord we see what God was working in that they then worked out. So we can learn from the work of God's grace in the lives of sinners. Thankfully God's Word is not like other religious books. Secondly, the Bible doesn't whitewash anyone for the Bible lets us see not only the beauty marks of grace in people but warts, pimples, scars and all as well. Thirdly, so many of these people become a type of Christ and point us to Christ in a particular way. Again, we get to see some of the errors they make and that brings to Deborah in this study.

There is not a lot of negative revealed about Deborah in the writer of the book of Judges and in the subsequent passages that refer to her in the New Testament. We do see that she is in the setting of the book of Judges. The book of Judges covers approximately 430 years. Israel has come in under Joshua and has occupied the land of Promise but they had not fully occupied the land of Promise. They left the high places and some of the fortified cities. They didn't completely drive out those Canaanite nations and the result was the paganism that was up on the high places began to filter back down into the lives of God's people.

There is an interesting statement in the book of Judges and before we look at Judges 4 and 5 I want you to see this in Judges 21. The book of Judges leaves you with a message it certainly wants you to remember. Judges 21:25 says *[25] In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.* Of course that is a deduction that is true and false. There was no king like the other nations in Israel but they had a King. Their King was the God of glory. This was not like any other nation. This was a covenanted nation. It was a nation that God had established a covenant with them through Abraham, renewed it with Moses and this was a true theocracy for God was King. Yet the people didn't respond to their God as King. Because they didn't respond to God as King they continued to face seasons of judgement from their God, by oppression from those who surrounded them, debilitation and even descending into depravity as a nation. Thus the book of Judges.

How many judges does the book record? It records 12 judges. These judges not only have some beauty marks of grace but they have a lot of warts and pimples. One of the most challenging studies I have ever done was on the life of Gideon. He ascends to the hill of triumph and trust in the Lord yet he continually descends to faithlessness and eventually becomes a blithe upon the people of Israel, he and his family. In the midst of these judges, the fourth one mentioned in this book is the one named Deborah. One of the reasons I am doing here is that I want to include women in these biographical sketches and in a few more studies I will also do Miriam who is in the same guild as Deborah.

Some might wonder what I mean by the same guild and the Bible identifies Deborah as a prophetess. There are only five prophetesses identified in the Old Testament. One of those is Miriam. In this study you will actually get two for one for the Lord delivers His people through Deborah but also through another woman for in the same narrative two women are used of God to dispatch the enemies of God and deliver the people of God.

In the book of Judges there is usually a judge and an antagonist but there are couple of times in this book that you have two and two and not one and one. This is one where you have Deborah and Barak, her appointed general. Then you have the antagonist which is the King of Canaan who is Jabin and his general, Sisera. So first we'll take a look at Deborah's origin, and her calling before we look at the text and then we'll look at her legacy.

In the Bible there are two Deborah's. The one mentioned first is found twice in the book of Genesis and she is the servant of Rebekah, as she was brought by the servant to marry Isaac. She outlived her mistress and the Bible says she became a part of God's covenant community. We are going to find out that God conquers His enemies through a bee and a mountain goat. The name Deborah in Hebrew means 'bee.' I love bees because I found out about 15 years ago that one spoonful of local honey will deal with your allergies and it's the only food that can't go bad. This Deborah who is a bee is a woman called of the Lord to serve Him.

Deborah exists to the praise of God out of these northern tribes that were now dominated. The kingdom of Israel has not divided into the north and south but the northern tribes that are up around the Galilee area are being dominated by the Canaanites because the Canaanites had not been driven out and still occupy a chief city called Hazor.

Where are we in time here? Deborah is ministering in the 13th century and it's 1209 B.C. She is by far the most Godly of all the prophets and we find out what her calling actually is. Deborah is called and identified in the Bible as one a prophetess. There were five in the Old Testament – Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), Huldah (II Kings 22:14), Noahdiah who proved to be a false prophetess (Nehemiah 6:14) and Isaiah's wife (Isaiah 8:3) whose name is not given by Isaiah. Deborah is also a judge and she is the only female judge of the 12 in the book of Judges. The people begin to come to her for their cases to be decided at the palm tree which was up in northern Israel. Thirdly, she was also a leader.

Deborah is called of God to call on a man named Barak. Barak is also called of the Lord to serve Him as the general of an army of 10,000 that he is to raise. Chiefly, this army is to be raised from the tribe of Zebulun and Naphtali but four other tribes contributes to the war efforts against Jabin and Sisera so likely he raised more than the initial 10,000. He is called on by Deborah to join in the battle with a promise from God that Barak would be given the victory. When Barak receives the call he reveals his availability but also his cowardice and his lack of faith. Deborah tells him to come because God has promised him victory over Jabin, Sisera, their chariots, all their instruments of war and everything.

Barak says he will do it but only if Deborah goes with him. You will see this time and time again when you study the book of Judges where one will say ‘I’ll come but I need this one or that one or something to go with me.’ There seems to be a qualifying dynamic and so it is true with Barak the general. Deborah doesn’t hesitate one bit when she says ‘I’ll go’ for her courage and trust in the Lord is abundantly clear. She also tells him that if he has chosen such a route to go only if she goes with him then the honor that he should have of serving the Lord and the Lord using him will not be given to him but will be given to a woman. That will be abundantly clear.

So what happens? Whenever you study the book of Judges there are two cycles that are always prevalent. Cycle number one is 40 years. It’s interesting to note that what we see in the book of Judges we see in church history. When I tell people about the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) there is an amazing, precarious moment that local churches, denominations, seminaries and ministries seem to always encounter between the 40 to 80 year mark and that is a downgrade from faithfulness and to sometimes downright apostasy. You always have to fight it and be aware of it. I have been so blessed to see ministries aware of it and have responded. Every time I’ve seen churches avoid this downgrade or that departure or apostasy at this 40 to 80 year time frame, it has always been avoided by leadership. This is seen in the book of Judges where every time God does something to deliver them from that inevitable 40 year downgrade, He raises up a leader, even with imperfections, to do it.

I had the privilege to watch Reformed Theological Seminary I loved dearly come upon those same years and I thank God for the leaders they have had for when that time came that they could go the other direction God raised up some great leaders to put it back on track. I saw it in my alma mater of Westminster Seminary where God raised up a leader to reclaim and renew that seminary. It now has some even better faculty than it had originally and its enrollment is burgeoning as it trains ministers for the Gospel that stands against the trend all over America. I am praying the same thing will be true in my own denomination, the PCA, which is now in its 48th year and that it will be able to meet that with leaders.

The second cycle you see in the book of Judges is what I call ‘the pattern.’ It is a pattern that has seven elements to it and this will be how I walk you through Judges 4 and 5. The first element is that Israel would do evil in the sight of God and depart from the Lord. The second element is that the Lord would discipline them by giving them over to oppressors who were all around them, bringing the oppressor mastery over His people. Thirdly, God, for a period of time, allows His people to serve their oppressors which is oppressive and it seemingly looks like the oppressors are in full control. The fourth element is that Israel finally cries out to the Lord. Fifthly, is that God answers their cries and you see God’s answer of Divine grace as He raises up a deliverer. In these cases the deliverers are judges and leaders who will be anointed by the Spirit of God for what they have been called to do. Sixthly, the result is the oppressor is defeated for what seems to be an insurmountable and unconquerable enemy is overcome by the Lord working through His people being led by an anointed deliverer. Lastly, the land is given rest by the Lord and the people are given peace from the Lord, until this cycle repeats.

This pattern helps us as we glean from the life of Deborah. We see right off how the pattern has started again. Let’s look at Judges 4:1–7 which says *[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, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. [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.* (God is going to raise up a leader, an anointed deliverer.)

[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 the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali 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?’”

The Kishon River goes through the valley of Jazreel which stands under a mountain called Megiddo (Armageddon). Napoleon when he marched through this area said ‘this is the most perfect battle field in all of the world. Many battles have been fought here but this is the first one that is recorded in Scripture. Today the Kishon River is mostly a dry river or creek except during rainy season. There will be another battle fought here in the days of Gideon, in the south eastern part of the valley of Jazreel. It is there that Gideon will fight the Midianites. Another battle after this will be fought there and Saul will be defeated and killed here along with his sons. Elisha will be back at this same river of Kishon and will do battle with the prophets of Baal where he will defeat them. It will also be a place where World War II is fought. The Bible uses this place to depict the consummation of the ages in the book of Revelation. Let’s continue in the passage.

Here we see it’s not enough for the Lord to make these promises but Barak needs Deborah. Deborah on the one hand rebukes him but on the other says ‘let’s just get the job done. Judges 4:8–10 says [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.” [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. [10] And Barak called out Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh. And 10,000 men went up at his heels, and Deborah went up with him.

Now here is one of those back-at-the-ranch moments where we have a scene in the middle of this unfolding narrative. Judges 4:11 says [11] Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the Kenites, the descendants of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaanannim, which is near Kedesh. The Kenites were the people who befriended Israel when they were in the wilderness and from which Moses got his wife, Zeporah. We are about to get an individual application of where the Kenites befriend Israel and Israel befriends the Kenites.

Mount Tabor is a smooth round top mountain and some people believe it was the sight of the Mount of Transfiguration. It borders the valley of Jazreel on the northeast side. Thousands of troops will gather on the side of the mountain at the call of Barak but under the direction of Deborah who is there with him. So let’s continue in the text.

Judges 4:12–16 says [12] When Sisera was told that Barak the son of Abinoam 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, from Harosheth-hagoyim to the river Kishon. [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 to Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left.

Now we'll get some further information about Heber the Kenite from Judges 4:11. We will see he has a wife and I would say no one wants to mess with this woman, named Jael. I think a song in the 1960's was written about his wife titled 'Killing Me Softly.' Jael's name means mountain goat. Here is what happens.

Judges 4:17–24 says [17] *But Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house 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, for I am thirsty."* 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.

[23] *So on that day God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan before the people of Israel.* [24] *And the hand of the people of Israel pressed harder and harder against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.* So the Lord delivered His people miraculously and the woman received the honor of taking Sisera out of the scene. Deborah as well but more precisely it was Jael. The bee and the mountain goat had done their work in the hands of the Lord. Now His people were at peace and the land was given rest.

Then comes the only song recorded in the book of Judges and it's a wonderful song for study. Judges 5:1–7 says [1] *Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam 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.* (God gets the praise for the victory! He is worshipped.)

[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.* (This same God shows up in the shadow of the valley of Megiddo as He brought a thunderstorm and that dry creek became a rushing torrent.)

[6] *"In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were abandoned, and travelers kept to the byways.* [7] *The villagers ceased in Israel; they ceased to be until I arose; I, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel.* We see another calling of Deborah for she was a mother and we need male and female leaders. Each has its role for we understand qualified men in the church's offices but the church needs fathers and mothers. They are complementary in their relationship not only in the family but in the family of God. Deborah was a mother of Israel who was there and ready to serve the Lord with all of her heart. Let's continue.

Judges 5:8–11 says [8] *When new gods were chosen, then war was in the gates. Was shield or spear to be seen among forty thousand in Israel?* [9] *My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel who offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless the LORD.*

(Deborah saw the courage of the outnumbered troops and saw the commanders of the armies lead them out.)

[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. Deborah states who won the victory for it was a sovereign God but she also affirms men and women rising up to do what God called them to do, taking on their responsibilities. She honors the Lord for the victory and those who showed up for the battle – the villagers, the commanders, soldiers. Let’s continue.

Judges 5:12–18 says [12] “Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, break out in a song! Arise, Barak, lead away your captives, O son of Abinoam. [13] Then down marched the remnant of the noble; the people of the LORD marched down for me against the mighty. [14] From Ephraim their root they marched down into the valley, following you, Benjamin, with your kinsmen; from Machir marched down the commanders, and from Zebulun those who bear the lieutenant's staff; [15] the princes of Issachar came with Deborah, and Issachar faithful to Barak; into the valley they rushed at his heels. Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. [16] Why did you sit still among the sheepfolds, to hear the whistling for the flocks? Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. [17] Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan; and Dan, why did he stay with the ships? Asher sat still at the coast of the sea, staying by his landings. [18] Zebulun is a people who risked their lives to the death; Naphtali, too, on the heights of the field.

In other words, there were tribes that didn’t show up and now they received the judgment of God. Only six tribes showed up but here we see those who didn’t.

Judges 5:19–23 says [19] “The kings came, they fought; then fought the kings of Canaan, at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo; they got no spoils of silver. [20] From heaven the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera. [21] The torrent Kishon swept them away, the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon. March on, my soul, with might! (Because of the storm the Lord brought the soil became nothing but mud carpets that bogged the oppressors down.)

[22] “Then loud beat the horses' hoofs with the galloping, galloping of his steeds. [23] “Curse Meroz, says the angel of the LORD, curse its inhabitants thoroughly, because they did not come to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty. A sovereign God won the victory, honors the ones who showed up and will bring discipline upon those who ran from the moment of the battle. Let’s continue.

Judges 5:24–31 says [24] “Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, of tent-dwelling women most blessed. [25] He asked for water and she gave him milk; she brought him curds in a noble's bowl. [26] She sent her hand to the tent peg and her right hand to the workmen's mallet; she struck Sisera; she crushed his head; she shattered and pierced his temple. [27] Between her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still; between her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell—dead. (This is a metaphor to show that this woman was used to bring down the powerful because it’s God who accomplishes the battle with His servants.)

[28] “Out of the window she peered, the mother of Sisera wailed through the lattice: ‘Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the hoofbeats of his chariots?’ [29] Her wisest princesses answer, indeed, she answers herself, [30] ‘Have they not found and divided the spoil?—A womb or two for every man; spoil of dyed materials for Sisera, spoil of dyed materials embroidered, two pieces of dyed work embroidered for the neck as spoil?’

[31] “So may all your enemies perish, O LORD! But your friends be like the sun as he rises in his might.” And the land had rest for forty years.

So we see the seven elements that is a pattern in the book of Judges just in these two chapters. I want you to walk away with the fact that God uses leaders. If you don't step up God won't be stopped for He'll raise up another leader. Our lack of availability and faithfulness does not stop the hand of the Lord. The question is not whether He is going to win the victory but the question is, will you get in on it or will somebody else take your place?

Barak didn't get the full engagement because he didn't trust. So honor goes to Deborah and Jael. Yet all of those who did show up in a citizen army, arose that day and the Lord led them to victory through their fighting and then with His supernatural power as the elements stand at His command to accomplish His purposes.

Praise God Jesus has won the war but don't be found wanting in the day of battle and don't be found wanting because you're home contemplating. Trust the Lord. Put on the full armor of the Lord. Some of you are leaders of 10, 20 or 30 and some of us are to be led, but let's be there and let not another take our place for the Lord wins the victory. Do I want honor that much? You better believe it because then I get to take that honor and give to Him in worship and praise when I stand before Him, because He won the victory. Let's pray.

Prayer:

God, thank You so much for the time together in Your Word. Thank You for a woman of God, a mother of Israel, one who spoke forth Your Word, one who had wisdom for the judgments when people came to her, one who would not be stopped by the shortcomings of others and one who You used, Deborah. We give You praise. May her tribe increase. Raise up the mothers of Israel who will show wisdom, discernment, lead their families and the family of God into the battle for the glory of God, for I pray in Jesus' Name, the One who makes leaders and uses them, our Leader triumphant, Christ, Amen.

Power Point

TWO CYCLES

40 Years

The Pattern

- I. Israel does evil in the sight of the Lord
- II. Lord disciplines – gives over to oppressors
- III. Israel serves their oppressors
- IV. Israel cries out to the Lord
- V. Divine answer–Deliverer/Leader Spirit-anointed
- VI. Oppressor defeated miraculously
- VII. The Land is given rest and People peace