

Judges | When All Hell Breaks Loose

The Delightful Dynamic

Judges 4-5 (reading 5.1-9, 24-31)

9.29.19

Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying, ² "That the leaders led in Israel, That the people volunteered, Bless the LORD! ³ "Hear, O kings; give ear, O rulers! I-- to the LORD, I will sing, I will sing praise to the LORD, the God of Israel. ⁴ "LORD, when You went out from Seir, When You marched from the field of Edom, The earth quaked, the heavens also dripped, Even the clouds dripped water. ⁵ "The mountains quaked at the presence of the LORD, This Sinai, at the presence of the LORD, the God of Israel. ⁶ "In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, In the days of Jael, the highways were deserted, And travelers went by roundabout ways. ⁷ "The peasantry ceased, they ceased in Israel, Until I, Deborah, arose, Until I arose, a mother in Israel. ⁸ "New gods were chosen; Then war was in the gates. Not a shield or a spear was seen Among forty thousand in Israel. ⁹ "My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel, The volunteers among the people; Bless the LORD! ¹⁰ "You who ride on white donkeys, You who sit on rich carpets, And you who travel on the road-- sing! ¹¹ "At the sound of those who divide flocks among the watering places, There they shall recount the righteous deeds of the LORD, The righteous deeds for His peasantry in Israel. Then the people of the LORD went down to the gates. ¹² "Awake, awake, Deborah; Awake, awake, sing a song! Arise, Barak, and take away your captives, O son of Abinoam. ¹³ "Then survivors came down to the nobles; The people of the LORD came down to me as warriors. ¹⁴ "From Ephraim those whose root is in Amalek came down, Following you, Benjamin, with your peoples; From Machir commanders came down, And from Zebulun those who wield the staff of office. ¹⁵ "And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; As was Issachar, so was Barak; Into the valley they rushed at his heels; Among the divisions of Reuben There were great resolves of heart. ¹⁶ "Why did you sit among the sheepfolds, To hear the piping for the flocks? Among the divisions of Reuben There were great searchings of heart. ¹⁷ "Gilead remained across the Jordan; And why did Dan stay in ships? Asher sat at the seashore, And remained by its landings. ¹⁸ "Zebulun was a people who despised their lives even to death, And Naphtali also, on the high places of the field. ¹⁹ "The kings came and fought; Then fought the kings of Canaan At Taanach near the waters of Megiddo; They took no plunder in silver. ²⁰ "The stars fought from heaven, From their courses they fought against Sisera. ²¹ "The torrent of Kishon swept them away, The ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon. O my soul, march on with strength. ²² "Then the horses' hoofs beat From the dashing, the dashing of his valiant steeds. ²³ 'Curse Meroz,' said the angel of the LORD, 'Utterly curse its inhabitants; Because they did not come to the help of the LORD, To the help of the LORD against the warriors.' ²⁴ "Most blessed of women is Jael, The wife of Heber the Kenite; Most blessed is she of women in the tent. ²⁵ "He asked for water and she gave him milk; In a magnificent bowl she brought him curds. ²⁶ "She reached out her hand for the tent peg, And her right hand for the workmen's hammer. Then she struck Sisera, she smashed his head; And she shattered and pierced his temple. ²⁷ "Between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay; Between her feet he bowed, he fell; Where he bowed, there he fell dead. ²⁸ "Out of the window she looked and lamented, The mother of Sisera through the lattice, 'Why does his chariot delay in coming? Why do the hoofbeats of his chariots tarry?' ²⁹ "Her wise princesses would answer her, Indeed she repeats her words to herself, ³⁰ 'Are they not finding, are they not dividing the spoil? A maiden, two maidens for every warrior; To Sisera a spoil of dyed work, A spoil of dyed work embroidered, Dyed work of double embroidery on the neck of the spoiler?' ³¹ "Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD; But let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might." And the land was undisturbed for forty years.

We're looking at The Book of Judges this fall. It's about the Israelites carrying out God's instructions to reclaim the Land that He promised them. They are to DO what Adam failed to do and that is to turn the jungle into a cultivated garden. They're to subdue the waste-land and make it flourish and bloom like Eden.

AND they're to drive out the serpent from the garden. Remember God's judgment on the enemy in Genesis 3: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; her seed shall bruise you on the head and you shall bruise him on the heel." (3.15)

And the seed of the serpent in the form of false religion that sacrifices human children on altars to idols – the people who engage in that idolatry, the seed of the serpent have to be driven out of the Land.

The serpent's head will be bruised by the seed of the woman... That's one reason there are a few heads bruised in this book (9.53)... But, as we've seen, the mission to turn the Land into Eden is failing – Israel is more interested in coexisting/mixing with the religion of the serpent... and THIS section begins in CH 4 with those sad words, "Then after the death of Ehud, the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD"

One aspect of the curse in Genesis CH 3 is discord – discord between people and the earth (nature) and discord between men and women. And THIS section on Deborah and Barak give us a glimpse of that discord resolved – at least temporarily suspended.

A delightful dynamic is set up where DISCORD is stilled and grace and shalom (flourishing) emerges. As we look at it I hope it kindles in us a HOPE for the future and a desire to see a foretaste of Eden even in our day – right here... a little glimpse of the delightful dynamic.

Let's look at: 1) Story/Song 2) Warrior/Worshiper and 3) Singing/Situating

First, STORY and SONG. The two chapters we're reading are telling a story (CH 4) and then a kind of artistic/poetic/theological reflection in CH 5 – a story and then a song. So, let me quickly recount the story (CH 4) and then ask, "why the SONG?"

A Canaanite king named Jabin but the focus is on his general, Sisera who abused ("forcibly squeezed") the Israelites for ten long years (he had 900 iron chariots).

During this time the judge or governor was a woman named Deborah. She sat under a palm-tree (Eden!) and governed Israel. She was also a prophetess – i.e. she was given direct revelation from God.

And she called a man named Barak from a city called Kadesh – it’s important to know his origins because that was a Levitical city. Each tribe (Josh 20) had to designate cities where the priests would live and it’s repeated FOUR TIMES that Barak was from one such city and would have been a Levite i.e. a member of the priestly tribe... AND this is why Deborah called him because priests led the battles. Remember the battle of Jericho when the priests carried the Ark of the Covenant around the city seven times.

She prophesied to Barak “Behold, YHWH, the God of Israel, has commanded, 'Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men... '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.” (4.6)

Now this is a woman serving as prophet and as a king but she can’t serve as priest to lead into battle – for that she needs a male priest (of the three sacred offices prophet, priest and king there’s no record of a woman priest). But Barak pushes back: “I’ll go but only if you go with me!”

And I THINK he’s saying, “How do I know you're really a prophetess speaking for God – are you willing to put your life on the line?”

But Sisera is notoriously cruel to women (see end of the song) and Barak is putting Deborah in grave jeopardy...So, she issues a mild reprimand, “OK – I’ll go but YOU WILL NOT GET THE W”

The glory will go to a woman – it looks like Deborah is going to be remembered as the victor.

So, Barak musters the troops – 10,000 from two tribes and few real weapons...against 900 iron chariots.

But chariots are no good in the mud and it looks like it rained and maybe the river overflowed and Sisera the war-criminal (more on that in a moment) runs on foot (leaves his chariot) and goes to a tent of a family with whom he had some sort of treaty.

They were Kenites (like Caleb) – not Israelites but some of them had sort of joined Israel (like Caleb) and the cruel Sisera shows up at this tent where the man of the house is away... But his wife, Jael, is home and she offers him hospitality.

He asks for water. She goes above and beyond and gives him some warm milk...and then puts a comforter on him and lets him rest. But before he falls asleep, he says, “One more thing: you better lie! If anyone asks if there’s a man in your tent, say “NO!”

Then Jael (“mountain-goat”) returns, sure-footed and stealthy. She crouches over the war-criminal and drives a tent-peg right through his skull and into the ground and he dies. Then Barak shows up but he doesn't get the “W” – it went to a woman (not even an Israelite!)

Now the song that comes in the next chapter is meant to help us see certain things about this whole episode. It's an artistic, theological interpretation.

It's co-authored by the prophetess/judge and the priest together – man and woman cooperating as it was at the start in Eden.

It begins with the delight of cooperation – when leaders lead and people willingly volunteer it's a wonderful thing! "That the leaders led in Israel, that the people volunteered, Bless the LORD!" (5.2)

When God's people step, each one into their roles and callings and each one exercises his or her gifts in the ways that God intends it's delightful! It makes you see the worth and beauty of God.

It's so hard to fabricate that kind of cooperation and unity where there's no competition or suspicion or envy and endless comparison/competition THAT WHEN IT DOES ACTUALLY WORK – it makes you think that God is behind it and leads you to stand in awe of Him.

It's like these enormous schools of fish or flocks of birds that somehow, mysteriously, miraculously move in harmony and as if they are ONE organism. You feel like THIS is how God intended for it to be!

That's the dominant theme of this song, sung by the duo of Deborah and Barak! God called Deborah and she arose, "a mother in Israel". There was weird opposition, "new gods" but the True God answered that weirdness with harmony, a taste of Eden: (9) "my heart goes out to the commanders and the volunteers among the people; Bless the LORD!"

The discord of the Fall and the Curse are rolled back and for a moment, there's a glimpse of the delightful dynamic – shalom. The discord between men and women broke down. The discord between humanity and nature was neutralized and the earth quaked, the heavens dripped, the clouds dripped water, the mountains quaked, the stars, the river (v. 21 – "the torrent of Kishon swept them away"), the horses even help us – WE WERE BACK IN THE GARDEN! We were at one with each other and with nature!

Jael answered her calling – the seed of the woman crushed the head of the serpent.

But poor Barak – helped write the song and with Deborah SANG the song but isn't mentioned in the song. And I think he was fine with that.

I think he realized that ... albeit reluctantly, he did answer his calling as a warrior and worshiper. He was a priest and the way God's people defeat their enemies is by worship. In the end Barak was powerfully reminded that to lead the people in worship is the way to lead them to victory.

It seems weird and counterintuitive to sing our way to victory but that's life in the Upside-down Kingdom and of course it all looks forward, once again, to the Ultimate Judge – Jesus Christ the Prophet, Priest and King who on the eve of His own great battle (death) – as our great High Priest (the Warrior/Worshiper) – He offers Himself a sacrifice, “this is My Body” and then they sang a hymn and went out. (Mt. 26.30)

“Lord, I bet if You knew they were going to arrest You and kill You, I bet You wouldn't have had that ceremonial meal AND I KNOW You wouldn't have sung a song – that's the last thing You should'a done...right?”

Actually, it's the way the victory is won...that is if you realize the Battle Belongs to the LORD!

Jesus is the Warrior/Worshiper – He is the Priest who answers the Call (as Barak hesitated to do) and He is the Priest who offers the perfect offering – His life of love fulfilling the Law and the sacrifice of His own Body... By His priestly act, He crushes the head of the serpent and guarantees that the whole Earth will be restored to Eden.

Barak is the priest who hesitated and gave his glory to a woman. Jesus Christ is the Priest who does NOT hesitate and still gives His glory to a Woman – to His own Bride, the Church – i.e. to US.

HE, Jesus Christ, crushes the serpents head (Gen 3.15) – He is THE Seed of the woman and He is the Worshiping Warrior and the Priest who leads us to victory over the world, flesh and devil as we join in His song (Rom 16.20 – “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.”)

Deborah is the mother of Israel – she is a kind of symbol for the church – the Seed comes from her, the seed of Israel, seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head.

And in contrast to her, is (end of this song v.28ff) the mother of the serpent. This is a mockery of Sisera's mother. At the end of the song, she's boasting about how her son would pillage and rape. She's looking out her window wondering why her son is taking so long to return. She says, “Hmmm...he's probably dividing the spoils of his victory...got some fine embroidery around his neck...got two women that he's stolen and violating them right now – I'm so proud of my little war-criminal...the SPOILER!” (She's the wicked witch!)

But it turns out that the violator got violated, the ruiner got ruined – his pattern was to abuse TWO maidens but THIS TIME, two maidens abused him!

And so today, we celebrate OUR Great High Priest and His Bride, His Deborah, the Church. She offers true hospitality to all God's people. Everyone tired from sin and from the fallen-ness of

this world – this Eden that has become a jungle. She, the Church, the Mother of God’s Children, “Come in!” she says, “I’ll give ya’, shelter from the storm!”

The Church calls you to worship – to sing and to be situated. That’s our last point (Story/Song , Worshiper/Warrior and SINGING/SITUATING). She calls you to singing.

You may not be good at singing and you may think singing is just a waste of time – but she says, “Bring the voice God gave you, and come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.” (Psa 95 KJV)

It’s counterintuitive – it’s a “royal waste of time” and it’s the most truly efficient activity – worship sweetly convinces us: “the battle belongs to the LORD!”

And in this battle, a Priest is the general. Jesus Christ sings with us – He sings OVER us – “The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.” (Zep 3.17 NIV)

By these songs... we soak together in the Gospel and as this grace and this sense of God’s undeserved favor soaks into us – the people volunteer freely in the day of His power (Ps 110.3) . Grace sweetly situates us.

When you get it...when IT gets you... God’s grace given to us by Jesus Christ, the Priest who is also the sacrifice – GOD’S GRACE moves you to sing and to situate – to find your gifts and to employ them in the Church. (1 Peter 4.10)

We play our part – I’m not trying to guilt you into anything here – I’m just saying that while churches are NOT perfect (this church has its issues) but when you... WHEN WE...are focused on God’s great plan, God’s Great Son, the Better Barak, Jesus Christ (the Priest who never hesitated) and God’s Bride, the Better Deborah, the Mother of God’s Children, the Church – WHEN IT DAWNS ON US (as it often does when we get out of ourselves in worship – in singing God’s truth/grace) THEN we get caught up in the delightful dynamic.

We get a little glimpse at Eden – the way things are supposed to be. Restored relationships and giving our time, money, attention our gifts, leaders leading, members volunteering – the serpent defeated, God exalted... and (final words) “let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might. And the land was undisturbed for forty years.” (31)