

Lesson 2 – Judges 4-5

Text: Judges 4-5

Main Characters: God, Israelites, Deborah, Barak, Jabin, Sisera, Jael

Key Passages:

- Judges 4:1-4 – The cycle of sin began again for the Israelites. Note God’s involvement.
- Judges 4:14-15, 23 – God was the one fighting against the Canaanites; He won the battles.
- Judges 5:31 – A prayer by Deborah to God on for the enemies and friends of God.

Main Storyline:

Following Ehud’s death, the Israelites again fell into disobedience and stopped following God. As a result, God became angry and punished them by allowing Jabin, king of Canaan, to dominate the Israelites. Jabin lived in Hazor, the city that had previously been destroyed by the Israelites under Joshua’s leadership (recall Joshua 11, the northern campaigns). It seems as though the Canaanites were able to regroup and rebuild the city at some point between Joshua 11 and Judges 4. Jabin had placed a man named Sisera in charge of his armies. Sisera lived in a city called Harosheth Hagoyim.

The Canaanites ruled over the Israelites for 20 years, relying on 900 iron chariots to help enforce their dominion over them. Eventually, the Israelites recognized their sin, repented, and cried out to God for deliverance. God responded by raising up another judge, Deborah, who lived in the tribe of Ephraim.

One day, she called a man from the tribe of Naphtali, Barak, to lead 10,000 men from Naphtali and Zebulun against Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army. She told him that God had promised to deliver Sisera into his hand (victory). Barak told Deborah that he would go, as long as Deborah accompanied him, and she agreed. However, she went on to tell Barak that he would not be the one to kill Sisera, but a woman would kill him instead. They both went up to Mount Tabor with the men.

A man named Heber, a Kenite, had moved away from his people and had pitched his tent in the area. He and his family had made peace with Jabin and Sisera. When they saw Barak’s army going to Mount Tabor, they informed Sisera. Sisera gathered up all of his men and chariots to the River Kishon.

Deborah told Barak that it was time for the battle, for God had gone out before him and delivered Sisera into his hand. Barak went down from Mount Tabor and fought Sisera at the River Kishon. God helped Barak and his men to win the battle overwhelmingly, with not a single Canaanite surviving. Barak pursued the Canaanite army as far as Harosheth Hagoyim, Sisera’s home.

During the battle, however, Sisera dismounted his chariot and ran away to Heber’s tent (most likely in the opposite direction from where his army was retreating). When he arrived, Jael (Heber’s wife) welcomed him, covered him with a blanket, and, at his request for some water, gave him milk. Sisera, before falling asleep, instructed Jael to tell anyone that came by that he was not there. When Sisera fell asleep, Jael took a tent peg and a hammer, quietly went over to him, and drove the tent peg through his temple, killing him. Barak later came to the tent, and Jael showed him Sisera lying dead.

On that day, Jabin was subdued before the Israelites. As the days passed, the hand of the Israelites grew stronger and stronger, until Jabin was destroyed. Deborah and Barak then sang a song to remember the plight of the Israelites and to praise God for delivering them.

Lessons/Applications:

- 1.) We must develop our “own faith” – we must mature beyond being good only when supervised.
- 2.) Sin can return to us if we do not continue to struggle against it (Matthew 12:43-45).
- 3.) The Lord can use whomever He chooses in order to accomplish His will (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).
- 4.) The Lord is in total control (Ephesians 3:20-21; Colossians 3:23-25).