Who Will Deliver Us?
  a study on Judges

Homework Questions, Week 5
  Judges 4 – 5

Many of these questions were taken from the following resources:
  Judges for You, by Timothy Keller
  Judges: the flawed and the flawless, by Timothy Keller (a 6-week Bible study)
  Judges and Ruth: there is a Redeemer, by Sarah Ivill (a 13-week Bible study)

Read Judges 4 – 5

*Note: Judges 5 is basically a re-telling of the events of chapter 4, but in song-form. It also gives us a different perspective on the events of chapter 4, almost like a theological take or interpretation on chapter 4’s story. Some questions unique to chapter 5 are at the end of the homework, but we will deal with much of chapter 5 as we work through chapter 4.

1. 4:1-3 – The Setting

In 4:1, we see the cycle starting again – “the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.” We also learn several specific things about their resulting oppression. From 4:3, as well as 5:6-7, how would you characterize the life of the Israelites during this time? (Compare 4:3 with 3:8, 14).

2. 4:4-5 – The Judge

In 4:4, we meet Deborah. She is different from previous judges – and from all the judges to come – in several ways. First, she is a woman (duh). What else do you notice in these verses about how she is different from the other judges we have met so far?

Although it is not the main point of the passage, the life and actions of Deborah have long been dissected in the discussion of women’s roles and activities within the church. However, many have used what she does or doesn’t do in these chapters as justification for their views, and made conclusions accordingly. Remember from the intro to Judges – description is not prescription! Just because something is described does not mean it is being upheld as right. Because of this tendency to use Deborah’s life as justification for various arguments (and because she’s just so cool), we will take some time to observe what she actually does, and what it is fair to conclude from her actions about women and their roles.

1. Deborah as prophetess
   There are two other women called prophetesses in the OT. Look up Ex. 15:20-21 and 2 Kgs. 22:14-20. What do you notice these women doing? Where do you see Deborah doing the same things in these chapters?

Jerram Barrs says of these women, “These women were given the gift of revealing the word of God to his people. God called each one of them to speak for him – to make known what he would do for his people, to reveal the future, to call the people to repentance, and to summon them to serve and follow the Lord” (p. 107, Through His Eyes).
2. Deborah as dispute-settler
   Unlike the other judges who only deliver in a military sense, she also rules the people, giving out judgments. She actually does have a legal function – the reference in v. 5 to her “sitting under the palm of Deborah” is a typical position that judges would take in those days. Tim Keller says of her that she comes the closest to “being a godly leader of the people, instead of simply a general...in this sense [she is] the greatest pointer to the monarchy and even the Christ” (p. 54-55, *Judges for You*).
   • Is it surprising to you to hear Deborah talked about this way? Is it surprising to you that it is the woman judge in Judges that is the closest to being the ruler of the people? Why or why not?

3. Deborah as military deliverer
   Again, unlike the other judges, Deborah herself does not lead the army into battle. Instead, she calls Barak and gives him the Lord’s command to lead the troops (4:6-7). However, she also goes with Barak and gives the command for the battle to begin (4:14). As Jerram Barrs puts it, “Deborah is the one who gives the military strategy devised by the Lord. It is very clear from the text that it is Deborah who tells Barak where to go to engage the enemy in battle, it is Deborah who tells Barak whom he should call up for the troops, and it is Deborah who gives the battle plan” (p. 109, *Through His Eyes*).

Having considered what she does as a prophetess, a dispute-settler, and a military deliverer, what are your impressions of Deborah? Description is not prescription, but considering what you have observed about Deborah in these chapters, how do you think Deborah is being portrayed in Judges? Take a look at 5:7 as well as you answer this question.

3. 4:6-10 – The Plan
   • What do you think of Barak’s request of Deborah to go with him, and of her response? Commentators are split on whether or not he is displaying disobedience/distrust, or obedience/faith in God. A few things to consider:
     o Read Heb. 11:1-2, 32-34 – who is mentioned here, and in what context?
     o Why might Barak want Deborah to go with him?
     o What does Deborah’s response to Barak communicate?
     o What do Barak’s actions after Deborah’s response communicate?
   • God tells Barak to gather 10,000 men. They will be up against 900 chariots of iron, chariots which the narrator takes care to mention three times (4:2, 7, and 12). Why do you think this is mentioned so many times? What would be the odds for 10,000 men versus 900 chariots?

4. 4:12-16 – The Battle
   • How is God portrayed, once more, as the true hero in this passage?

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1 The only other judge mentioned to do this is Samuel (see 1 Sam. 7:15).
• How does chp. 5 picture the battle between Barak’s men and Sisera’s forces (vv. 4-5, 19-22)? What does it tell us about why Israel won the battle?

5. 4:11, 17-22 – The Unlikely Victor

• What do you think about Jael’s actions? What was good? What was not good? How does 5:24 describe her? How would you square this with Jesus’ command to love, pray for, and bless our enemies in personal relationships (Lk. 6:27-28)?

• Read 5:28-30, where we learn a little more about Sisera and what he was like. “A womb or two for every man” means that Sisera’s mother knew that it was the norm for Sisera and his men to rape the women they conquered. How does the account of Jael’s murder of him show God’s justice (whether or not she was right to do it)?

• During this time, it was mainly the responsibility of women to set up the tents. Because of this, a tent mallet and peg would be seen as women’s tools – they are the equivalent of Jael’s frying pan. How does this contribute to the irony of her murder of Sisera, the woman-abusing general?

6. Chapter 5 – The Song of Praise

• Go through chapter 5 and take note of all the places the Lord’s name is used. How many do you find, and in what kinds of contexts? What do Deborah and Barak seem eager to communicate about the Lord in this passage?

• As mentioned before, this chapter is a more “theological” take, or “God’s perspective” on the events of the chapter before. What things in the song do Deborah/Barak affirm, and what do they deem unrighteous? (see especially v. 2, v. 8, v. 9, vv. 13-18, v. 23)

7. Application

1. Tim Keller says about these two chapters, “We can, and should, live our lives and order our memories not only historically but theologically – not simply recollecting what happened, or what we did, but searching out what God was doing. This keeps us from over-honoring ourselves in success, or despairing in our struggles. Part of the key to enjoying peace is to be continually praising the Lord for what he has done, and is doing, for us, because the story we tell of our lives is not so much about us, as about him” (p. 65, Judges for You).
   • What would it look like to have a theological perspective on our lives, looking at what God has been doing? What are some practical ways to do this? How could you start doing this?
   • If the “story we tell of our lives” is not about us, but Christ, then how does this change your perspective on painful things that happen to you?

2. After recounting the death of Sisera, Deborah and Barak sing, “So may all your enemies perish, O Lord!” (5:31) Sometimes we hear statements like this (or some statements in
the Psalms about God’s enemies), and feel uncomfortable, wondering how this fits with Jesus’ command to love our enemies. What (or who) do you think the “enemies of the Lord” might be?

3. There has been much discussion over how God views women in the Bible. How does the portrayal of Deborah (and even Jael!) in these chapters shape your understanding of how God views women?

4. This passage actually has quite a few people in it whom we can respect. Deborah is a godly leader, who gives God the glory. Barak faithfully leads God’s people into battle. Even Jael knows who the enemy of the Lord is, and aligns herself with the “right” side. But it is God who is the real Deliverer! It is God who gives his word to Deborah, God who raised her up, God who provided for Barak’s army to defeat the overwhelming odds of 900 chariots, and God who had Jael in the right place at the right time. God fights for his people, and he knows what he’s doing. How does this story – and seeing God fight for his people, sending just the right provision at just the right time – help us trust in him? Is there a specific area of life that you need to be reminded to trust him in?

8. WRAP-UP
From this passage…
  • What do you learn that humanity is like?
  • What do you learn that God is like?

What is one of your takeaways for this week? (Something you’d like to think more about, something that really stood out to you, something new to you, etc.)