

Opening Scripture: Judges 5:1–5

Introduction: Chapter 3 leaves off with a Judge named Shamgar who repelled a band of Philistines after Ehud's victory of King Eglon. However, despite the victories of Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar, the people once again lapsed back into unfaithfulness, forgetting their God and his covenant.

Who are the central characters? We're introduced to new characters in this unfolding drama.

- Deborah and Barak are the protagonists of the story. Deborah presides over Israel as a Judge and prophetess, while Barak the Naphtalian, serves as the commander and general of the LORD's armies.
- King Jabin the Canaanite and his General Sisera, are the antagonists in the story.
- Jael, Heber's wife. Heber was a supposed ally of Sisera and Jabin, but his wife Jael subverts our expectations in a surprise move at the end of story.

Now, I show you this map because I want you to see that we are not here dealing with fairytales.

We observe from this chapter several principles...

1. God's punishment for sin is corrective and redemptive. God judged them and sold them to King Jabin and delivered them in battle to be enslaved again by the Canaanites. Judges 4:1–3 "The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord after Ehud had died. ² So the Lord sold them to King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera who lived in Harosheth of the Nations. ³ Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord, because Jabin had nine hundred iron chariots, and he harshly oppressed them twenty years." The people, once again, are oppressed by their enemies due to their persistent unfaithfulness. God punishes them, but the consequences are temporary as, once again, God, in his grace, raises up two deliverers.

What other option did they have? The author means to highlight that there was another way to live.

Israel chose the pattern of failure, punishment, and deliverance rather than self-discipline. Let me be clear, just because you choose the path of righteousness and self-control does not mean you're never going to fail again. All of us have blind spots in our character, and we need the conviction of the Spirit and fellowship with thoughtful believers to help us grow through our shortcomings. John wrote in his epistle, "I write this to you so that you *won't sin*. **But if anyone should sin, he has an advocate**

with the Father.” The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, and self-control. Self-discipline is preemptive—that is, it keeps us from wrecking our lives and then begging God to bail us out because we blew it.

Look at how Paul described his effort in the Christian life...

1 Corinthians 9:24–27 “Don’t you know that the runners in a stadium all race, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way as to win the prize (How do runners in the Greek games do this?) ²⁵ Now, everyone who competes exercises self-control in everything (Olympians practice self-discipline in their diet, their exercise and rest regiments). They do it to receive a perishable crown, but we an imperishable crown. ²⁶ So I do not run like one who runs aimlessly or box like one beating the air (They keep their eyes on the finish line and make every effort count). ²⁷ Instead, I discipline my body and bring it under strict control, so that after preaching to others, I myself will not be disqualified.” Paul has no intention to show up on Judgment Day and have God reveal that he was a hypocrite, a phony who preached this message to others, while his own inner life of worship and devotion was in shambles.

1 Corinthians 11:31 “But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.” The context here is believers falling ill and even dying due to their dividing the body of Christ into factions and fiefdoms and then partaking in the Lord’s supper. Paul’s remedy is that they would practice judge their own actions and attitudes so as to avoid God’s punishment for sin.

Hebrews 12:7–8, 11 “Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? ⁸ But if you are without discipline—which all receive—then you are illegitimate children and not sons...¹¹ No discipline seems enjoyable at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

Application: Self-discipline is self-judgment (not to be confused with self-condemnation). We need to avoid becoming like the Israelites who constantly repeated the same cycle—failure > punishment > crying out for relief > deliverance > and repeating it. If we follow their pattern, then we begin to mischaracterize God as only being a God of love and will miss the fact that he is a perfect Father who knows how to parent his kids. Instead, we choose to submit our thinking and our patterns to God’s Word, which is inspired and useful to correct, to admonish, to instruct, and train us in righteousness.

2. Barak exemplifies flawed but genuine faith. Obedience demonstrates genuine faith. Barak’s faith faltered a bit at first, but then was confirmed by his obedience to the command. Judges 4:6–7 She summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, “Hasn’t the Lord, the God of Israel, commanded you, ‘Go, deploy the troops on Mount Tabor, and take

with you ten thousand men from the Naphtalites and Zebulunites? ⁷ Then I will lure Sisera commander of Jabin's army, his chariots, and his infantry at the Wadi Kishon to fight against you, and I will hand him over to you.”

So the battle unfolds exactly as the Lord predicted through Deborah. She and Barak and their armies go to the mountain, Sisera gets wind of this, he brings his troops in, thinking that this will be a cakewalk, and easy win.

Barak trusts the LORD but recognizes his need for help. Judges 4:8 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 “I will gladly go with you,” she said, “but you will receive no honor on the road you are about to take, because the LORD will sell Sisera to a woman.” Notice that General Barak agrees to lead the armies in battle, but with the caveat that Deborah goes with him.

Why did he think that he needed her?

Deborah is a symbol of authority. The nation already trusts her to settle cases with God's wisdom and character. Deborah's reputation precedes her. And sometimes, you need a person's help who is a proven leader, a faithful mentor whose character is proven and known. So not only does her presence in the battle have the ability to galvanize the troops, to unify them and bring them together as they see Israel's leaders presenting a unified front—but her presence also signals, most importantly, *that God is with them.* Commentators are quick to judge him as having failed and missing the blessing and the glory of killing Sisera. But Barak is still mentioned in the fall of fame of OT saints in Hebrews 11 and seems not to care about his glory. He'd rather have Deborah's company and all that comes with her endorsement, and I think that's an admirable quality. We tend to view our faith as if it were merely a private matter. It is personal but never private. It is distinctly ours but never discreet—it is intended to be lived out in the community.

God is faithful to give them the victory. Notice how God works:

- **God goes before them:** God is working in ways they cannot see and that won't become apparent until they look back and see all that the LORD had done on their behalf.

4:9 “**The LORD will sell General Sisera** to a woman.” God is the one setting up this whole situation.

4:14–15 Then Deborah said to Barak, “Go! This is the day **the Lord has handed Sisera over to you.** Hasn't the **Lord gone before you?**” So Barak came down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. ¹⁵ **The Lord threw Sisera, all his charioteers, and all his army into a panic** before Barak's assault. Sisera left his chariot and fled on foot.

4:23 “Verse 23 “**The Day God subdued King Jabin** of Canaan before the Israelites. The power of the Israelites continued to increase.” This is how God works on our behalf. God goes before us, to work in unseen and mysterious ways that often we

cannot see until the whole drama has concluded. Often we look back and see how God was working all around us to bring victory and accomplish his will in our lives. At the time we couldn't imagine all that He was doing.

Any battle you're facing in the Christian life:

- a battle over image and the desire to be conformed to the world's pattern of obsessing over your appearance or stuff.
- a battle of coveting—the desire for things that God has put off limits.
- the devil. Maybe you're sitting here and Satan is stalking you with temptation—to give in and go back to your old ways.
- a battle with doubt—maybe you're avoiding confronting your doubts. Maybe you're tempted to just give into them.
- a sense of failure. As a parent you are struggling trusting God with your kids and letting go when you need to.

Whatever the battle it is that you face, understand that in Christ the victory is already won, God is going before you and working around you to bring things together in ways you can't imagine; and God is working through you—through your efforts to have fearless conversations that you need to have, to take those steps you know you need to take, to face those fears that have gone unconflicted for too long.

- **God works through them:** Barak and his forces pursue the Canaanites and are successful.

4:16 “Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth of the Nations, and the whole army of Sisera fell by the sword; not a single man was left.”

So, Jabin's general fled to the home of a supposed ally—a friendly Israelite named Heber the Kenite. But Heber's wife, Jael, was a double agent. She invites the wounded and exhausted Sisera into her tent saying, “Come on in my lord, don't be afraid,” and covers his feverish, exhausted frame with a blanket. She lulls him to sleep and in his exhaustion, he passes out. And the Jael takes a tent spike and a hammer and drives it through his temple. Pinning him to the ground, killing him instantly.

God is going before them to cause confusion and chaos in the ranks of Sisera and his charioteers. God is working through Barak and his army as well as Jael as she deals the death blow.

Look at what Paul told the Philippians 2:12 “Therefore, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. ¹³ For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose. ¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling and arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world, ¹⁶ by holding firm to the word of life.”

3. Singing praise is a natural and proper response. We have Chapter 4 because they immediately they composed the whole story in song form. Deborah and Barak committed the memory of the whole thing to a melody, passing it on to future generations. Judges 5:1–5 “On that day, Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang: ² When the leaders lead in Israel, when the people volunteer, blessed be the Lord. ³ Listen, kings! Pay attention, princes! I will sing to the Lord; I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel. ⁴ Lord, when you came from Seir, when you marched from the fields of Edom, the earth trembled, the skies poured rain, and the clouds poured water. ⁵ The mountains melted before the Lord, even Sinai, before the Lord, the God of Israel.” I’ll have more to say about this point next week as we walk through Deborah’s song. But I thought we could end our time this morning by singing in the victory that God has accomplished for us.