

# Falling from Faithfulness: The Book of Judges Deborah and Barak

Introduction ⇒ More than one way to tell a story:

## Wikipedia:

SS Edmund Fitzgerald was an American Great Lakes freighter that sank in a Lake Superior storm on November 10, 1975, with the loss of the entire crew of 29. When launched on June 7, 1958, she was the largest ship on North America's Great Lakes, and she remains the largest to have sunk there.

## Lightfoot:

The legend lives on from the Chippewa on down  
Of the big lake they called 'gitche gumee'  
The lake, it is said, never gives up her dead  
When the skies of November turn gloomy  
With a load of iron ore twenty-six thousand tons more  
Than the Edmund Fitzgerald weighed empty  
That good ship and crew was a bone to be chewed  
When the gales of November came early

Does any one know where the love of God goes  
When the waves turn the minutes to hours?  
The searches all say they'd have made Whitefish Bay  
If they'd put fifteen more miles behind her  
They might have split up or they might have capsized  
They may have broke deep and took water  
And all that remains is the faces and the names  
Of the wives and the sons and the daughters

these two ways of telling a story are used to convey ⇒

2 ways: prose + poetry ⇒ the author of Judges uses both as in the case of the Edmund Fitzgerald

**Main Idea:** Salvation is all of God and/but God uses humans as his agents or instruments to bring salvation about and he holds them responsible for their actions. Therefore, we ought to give glory to God for his salvation and take responsibly as his agents and ambassadors on earth.

⇒ Before we get to the prose passage in which the story of Barak + Deborah is told, let's look at the poetry

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Judges 5 (ESV) → Judges 5 is a hymn of praise for the salvation that God brought about through Deborah and Barak. This

5 Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day:

will only hint at the full story that Judges 4 will tell!

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.

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.

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.

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.

10 "Tell of it, you who ride on white donkeys,  
you who sit on rich carpets  
and you who walk by the way.

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> “Awake, awake, Deborah!

Awake, awake, break out in a song!

Arise, Barak, lead away your captives,

O son of Abinoam.

<sup>13</sup> Then down marched the remnant of the noble;

the people of the Lord marched down for me against the mighty.

<sup>14</sup> 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;

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> Zebulun is a people who risked their lives to the death;

Naphtali, too, on the heights of the field.

<sup>19</sup> “The kings came, they fought;

then fought the kings of Canaan,

at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo;

they got no spoils of silver.

<sup>20</sup> From heaven the stars fought,  
 from their courses they fought against Sisera.

<sup>21</sup> The torrent Kishon swept them away,  
 the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon.  
 March on, my soul, with might!

<sup>22</sup> “Then loud beat the horses' hoofs  
 with the galloping, galloping of his steeds.

<sup>23</sup> “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.

<sup>24</sup> “Most blessed of women be Jael,  
 the wife of Heber the Kenite,  
 of tent-dwelling women most blessed.

<sup>25</sup> He asked for water and she gave him milk;  
 she brought him curds in a noble's bowl.

<sup>26</sup> 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.

<sup>27</sup> Between her feet  
 he sank, he fell, he lay still;  
 between her feet  
 he sank, he fell;  
 where he sank,  
 there he fell—dead.

<sup>28</sup> “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?’

<sup>29</sup> Her wisest princesses answer,  
 indeed, she answers herself,

<sup>30</sup> '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?'

<sup>31</sup> "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.

*The hymn delivers in poetic verse thick with imagery and figurative language what the prose passage of chapter 4 delivers in a much more straightforward way. Let's look at the story of Deborah and Barak by dividing the narrative into 6 scenes.*

### Six Scenes

① Introduction – v1-3

4 And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord after Ehud died. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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.

- The spectacular victory of Ehud has not altered the deep rooted propensity to forsake Yahweh and worship idols
- The introduction introduces the true conflict that requires resolution; God's people need God's salvation
- There is a problem when God's people are absent in person or in heart unless they are under the pressures of trials and tribulations

*What keeps you at church? What keeps you faithful? Is it the supreme worth of a glorious God and the unparalleled joy of serving him? Or do you only seek him when you need something and get desperate enough to cry out to him? As we examine the book of Judges, and return again and again to this "crying out to God in times of trouble," consider and evaluate your own relationship with your God and see if there isn't some similar tendency in you.*

② The Call of Barak – v4-10

<sup>4</sup> Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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.’ <sup>7</sup> 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?” <sup>8</sup> 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.” <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> And Barak called out Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh. And 10,000 men went up at his heels, and Deborah went up with him.

- The most prominent character is introduced first
  - Deborah is primarily a prophet as opposed to a deliverer - *she represents God in this cycle*
  - She raises the deliver – God is the one who raises up deliverers therefore she speaks for him
  - She promises her presence where God would normally do that – she speaks for God
  - Her name is absent from the narrative when it comes to the actions of deliverance
  - Barak is listed with the other deliverers in Hebrews 11
- Deborah is the most significant human character in this story
- God’s sovereignty is clearly on display as the enemies of Israel are puppet-like in how they are used by God—whether in the calling of Israel’s army or in the drawing out of Sisera and Jabin’s army

*Though Deborah is clearly a heroic figure, we will see and must not get that God is the one who saves and delivers*

*Not many biblical characters without a pronounced character flaw or a falling into sin... Deborah is one of them.*

3 The Defeat of Sisera – v11-16

<sup>11</sup> 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 Zaananim, which is near Kedesh.

<sup>12</sup> When Sisera was told that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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.

- Another character (Heber the Kenite); not much info or context-will be important later \*\*\*example from movie? *Smeagol/Gollum's initial role in THE HOBBIT leads to a much bigger part of the story in THE LORD OF THE RINGS*
- V12-16 describe the fulfilment of Deborah’s speech in v7
- V15 and 16 key to the entire chapter: <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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.
- God saves Israel; Barak saves Israel ⇒ *Main Idea* ⇒ *God saves and/ but uses humans as his agents*
- God gives tokens so that he is recognized as the ultimate cause and primary deliverer: the rain
- <sup>4</sup> “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.
- Also Jael’s location and participation point to the fact that this salvation is of God!

- When it comes to salvation, we can be tempted to focus on the instrument instead of the one using the instrument to bring about salvation – Craig McDonald and my goose call
- We want to focus on Deborah or Barak or Jael when the focus should surely remain on God
- *When you want to focus on the parent, spouse, counsellor, doctor, pastor, ... focus on God*

④ The Death of Sisera – v17-21

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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.’” <sup>21</sup> 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.

- This is the fulfilment of Deborah’s second speech
- The author, having emphasised the primary cause and worker of salvation (God) now focuses on the second half of our main idea: the involvement of humans who are responsible for their actions – there is no mention of God in this section, nor of Deborah the prophet of God
- Jael, residing in a location ordained by God for the purpose of bringing about God’s salvation, kills her family’s ally in a visceral and gruesome manner
- The story focuses on Jael as she would be the woman who receives glory that could have been Barak’s
- Her actions are treacherous, brutal, unexpected, and ultimately the principal event that secures deliverance from Jabin and Sisera
- **Dale Ralph Davis:** “Though Yahweh is clearly the source of salvation, he frequently uses means to bring it about.”

- Often those “means” <sup>are</sup> ~~and~~ human beings. Jael would be the means that God used to secure deliverance. And the fact that the glory would go to Jael instead of Barak indicates that our actions matter. They are significant.
- God’s foundational engagement with the world does not negate humanity’s secondary participation. Barak is held responsible for his actions. Jael is held responsible for hers. For good or bad, our decisions and actions matter even though the ultimate, primary mover is God.
- We also see that sometimes the salvation of God comes in a manner that is unexpected and oft unappealing to our senses; this would not be the last time God worked out a deliverance that involved a hammer and a spike and had brutality and violence at its core

### 5 The Arrival of Barak – v22

<sup>22</sup>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.

- The story concludes with Barak; he who was at first hesitant is now in hot pursuit
- But this would not be Barak’s victory or his glory
- God has used Jael to secure salvation

### 6 Conclusion – v23-24

<sup>23</sup>So on that day God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan before the people of Israel. <sup>24</sup>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.

- All the ~~characters~~ <sup>protagonists</sup> have disappeared save one: God
- And yet, our theme resurfaces again, here at the end of the story to emphasize its importance: God subdued Jabin; the people of Israel destroyed Jabin
- God saves and he uses people to accomplish it

## Seeing Christ

In this story we see that God is sovereign and gracious as he once again delivers his people who have fallen into unfaithfulness and as a result fallen into the hands of their enemies.

God, as the primary, independent, sovereign mover of all things is the one who saves and the one who delivers. Salvation is all of God. And yet, there is clearly human agency involved in God's salvation: Deborah, Barak, Jael.

Our Main Idea is evident in God's working of salvation for his people who did not deserve it: Salvation is all of God and/but God uses humans as his agents or instruments to bring salvation about and he holds them responsible for their actions.

This is true in the story of Deborah and Barak. But it is also true in the story of the greatest salvation that God performed. We see it in the salvation that God brought through his Son, Jesus Christ.

We see that when God decided to save sinful humanity, he did it as the sovereign God of the universe who had been the one that people sinned against. Despite creating mankind, and owning mankind, and despite reverence, awe, and worship being God's due from humanity, we rebelled against him. However, despite our unfaithfulness God still worked salvation on our behalf.

**Acts 2:22-23 (ESV)** <sup>22</sup> "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know— <sup>23</sup> this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. <sup>24</sup>

Salvation was God's plan. This was God's doing. And yet, we also see in this passage that God used a human agent to work out his salvation. Jesus, the God-man, would be the One whom through God would deliver his people.

And this brings us to the second half of our Big Idea: we ought to give glory to God for his salvation. Judges 5 indicates this is the desired response.

The first, and most important, way we give God the glory for his salvation is by availing ourselves of it. *Response*

## Application

A. Our first application is in regards to the final piece of the Big Idea: we ought to take responsibly as his agents and ambassadors on earth.

- a. We have a role to play in God's plan of salvation for our world. Salvation is all of God but we play a part.
- b. Romans 10:13-14 (ESV) <sup>13</sup> For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." <sup>14</sup> How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?
- c. We are God's agents of salvation and we are to share the gospel, the Good news of God's salvation through Jesus Christ, with the rest of the world. God will use us as instruments to bring about the salvation of his people through his Son.
- d. But we must take responsibility and preach the gospel. *⇒ When was the last time you shared the gospel w/ someone?*

B. Secondly, as it is Father's day let me take a moment to speak to the men in the congregation. All of us are called to be Father's, some biological, but everyone spiritual.

- a. I explained last week that when the author focuses on something and gives it special attention, we should take notice.
- b. The author of the Book of Judges spends a lot more time as he conveys the deliverance /apostasy cycle with the raising of the deliverer. Verses 6-8 deal with this.
- c. <sup>6</sup> 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.' <sup>7</sup> 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?" <sup>8</sup> 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." <sup>9</sup> 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."

- d. Why did the author not simply say, "God raised up a deliverer"? I think he did this to emphasize and draw attention to Barak's less-than-godly response. Barak hesitated and ~~abdicated~~ <sup>was prepared to abdicate</sup> his role in this story. It is clear that Deborah had the expectation that he would lead. It is clear that his hesitation is a negative reaction. He responded the way men have ~~always~~ <sup>continuously</sup> responded since Adam: ~~abdicate~~ our God-given responsibility to obey God through leadership. My challenge to the men here, to the biological and spiritual Fathers and the ones who will be: step up and look to fulfill what God has required of you. Don't abdicate and look to someone else to father your children or be a spiritual father to God's children. Initiate. Engage enthusiastically. Lead. God expects it.