

Study 2 Judges 4 Who Do You Place Your Trust In?

In the book of Judges chapter 4 we meet Deborah, the only Judge who was a woman. Unlike the other judges before and after her, Deborah delivered decisions on all kinds of social, and legal issues. She ruled not through sheer might but led from wisdom and character. Deborah was also the only Judge who was also a prophetess. Other prophetesses in the Bible include Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Noadiah (Numbers 6:14), and Anna (Luke 2:36). Deborah was married and as Israel's recognized Judge, people came to her to have their disputes decided (vs. 5). We read that Israel did evil once again and as a consequence God allowed one of the Canaanite kings, Jabin, with an army of 900 iron chariots, to cruelly oppress Israel for 20 years. The Canaanites were a powerful enemy because they had learned to use chariots and iron which gave them a "technological" military advantage over other armies.

Read chapter 4

1. What do we know about each of the following characters in the story: Deborah, Barak, Jabin, Sisera, Jael?
2. Why do you think Barak insisted Deborah go with him (verses 8-9)? Do you think it wrong for Barak to ask Deborah to accompany him?
3. In 4:7 we read that God would give the commander of Jabin's army, together with his chariots and troops, into the hands of Barak and the Israelite army.
 - a) Who routed general Sisera's army? (vs. 15)
 - b) How did God deliver this formidable army into Israel's hands (read 4:6-7 and 5:4,21)?
 - c) What does this story teach us about what God can do when we face impossible situations if we obey Him and trust Him when He calls us to act together with Him?
4. In 4:18 it appears that Jael is offering Sisera an ideal hiding place in her tent. In ancient Near Eastern custom men were prohibited from entering the tent of another man's wife. Nobody would have thought of searching her tent when Israel's army came looking for General Sisera. Jael kills Sisera despite her husband's (Heber the Kenite) friendly relations with the Canaanite king Jabin (verses 17-21). Why do you think Jael helped the Israelites? Why does she get credit for overcoming Israel's enemies instead of Barak?
5. What and who did Sisera put his trust in to protect him? How did each of these things fail him?
6. What are some of the things/people you have trusted in the past that have proved to be untrustworthy? Why do you think God wants us to put all of our trust in Him?

It is not wrong to seek the help of others when we go through difficult circumstances. But sadly, people sometimes disappoint us. God invites us to put out trust fully, completely in Him, even when

we are forced to wait for Him to act: “Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen, any God besides you who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.” (Isaiah 64:4)

Notes

Question 2

Tim Keller in his book, “Judges For You” suggests there are two views concerning Barak’s response to God’s call through Deborah, and Deborah’s reply to him:

1. Judges 4:8 points to Barak’s lack of faith. Judges 4:9 seems to support this, “Very well,” Deborah said, “I will go with you. But because of the way you are going about this the honour will not yours, ...”
2. Judges 4:8 is Barak acknowledging that Deborah is a godly leader and why wouldn’t Barak want a godly leader to accompany him? A better translation for 4:9 is, “On the expedition you are undertaking, the honour will not be yours” Deborah is not rebuking Barak, but simply telling him what will happen. In Hebrews 11:32-33 Barak, together with Gideon, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel are all examples of people of faith, even though the Bible also records for some of these men their wrong doing including moral failings. Once again, Judges is an example to us that God uses imperfect people and the Bible is not a book full of models to follow, but is about a God we can trust.

Question 3

- a. God clearly planned and routed the Canaanite army, but He chose to use people, Deborah, Barak and later Jael, to do this alongside of Him.
- b. Consider how God lured General Sisera and his formidable army to their destruction. God told Deborah to tell Barak to gather Israel’s army on Mount Tabor. Chariots can only be used on flat level ground. They could not go up Mount Tabor to fight Barak’s assembled army of foot soldiers. Sisera was lured into camping near a river, the Kishon River, at the foot of Mount Tabor. God then brought a rain storm that flooded the river, washing chariots away and making the ground so muddy next to the River that any remaining chariots would become stuck in the mud. This immobilized Sisera’s most powerful weapon, his iron chariots.