

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Judges And Ruth: Personal Blessing Amid Group Apostasy

Part II: History Of The Era Of The Judges

B. The Record Of Specific Judges, Judges 3:7-16:31

3. Deborah's Judgeship: Overcoming Weak Male Leadership By Heeding Scripture And Past Examples (Judges 4:1-24)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

We live in an era marked by a worldwide scarcity of courageous, spiritual, male leadership:

(1) The secular world recognizes this need: (a) Daniel Henninger's piece, "The Joy of Madness" in The Wall Street Journal, September 17, 2015, p. A13, stated, "(M)any of us . . . in the U. S. and all over a troubled world" are frustrated with "a spreading sense of weak or poor political leadership." (b) Locally, last Wednesday morning, October 7, 2015, on "The Talk of Connecticut" Brad Davis Show, I heard Mr. Davis explain to a caller, "Many of my callers have expressed dismay at the lack of any real leadership in our government."

(2) The problem also exists in many evangelical circles: Ken Ham, president of Answers in Genesis reported in his September 25, 2015 circular letter, "So many pastors . . . have told me . . . not to 'rock the boat' when I speak in their pulpit . . . not to 'upset those scientists or teachers in the congregation who might disagree with AiG,' or 'don't give that quote you use from President Obama on religion in America because some of our people voted for him' . . . And yet, I find many laypeople in our churches . . . desperately want their Christian leaders to speak with authority and 'tell it like it is' (with love, of course), and not dilute the truth through compromising!"

Need: *Accordingly, we ask, "What is the solution to the vacuum of courageous, spiritual, male leadership?!"*

- I. **After Ehud died, Israel turned away from God, so He let her be ruled by the Canaanite king Jabin who oppressed Israel through the threatening might of nine hundred iron chariots under his general, Sisera. Israel finally cried unto the Lord for deliverance after 20 years of such oppression, Judges 4:1-3.**
- II. **God's people were then judged by a WOMAN, Deborah, for cruel Canaanite domination had led Israel's men to fear leadership, Jud. 4:4. God then had Deborah tell Barak that God wanted him to lead 10,000 men from Israel's tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun to Mount Tabor, a mountain in the northeast part of the Plain of Esdraelon, and God would draw Sisera's forces out to the Kishon River that ran westerly 10 miles away near the southern part of that plain, and God would give Barak the victory, Judges 4:6-7.**
- III. **Yet, Barak agreed to lead only if Deborah went with him (Jud. 4:8), a Biblically inexcusable weak faith:**
 - A. Barak could have recalled God's past victories for Israel over chariots for encouragement to trust the Lord:
 1. God had given Joshua victory over hordes of northern Canaanite chariots under a former Jabin, king of Hazor at the Waters of Merom while Israel was initially conquering the Promised Land, Joshua 11:1-15.
 2. Also, when Israel crossed the Red Sea in the Exodus, Pharaoh's chariot army had pursued Israel into the seabed only to be killed when God had brought the sea wall waters crashing in upon them, Ex. 14:21-30.
 - B. Barak could have recalled God's Word for hope that God would grant him victory over Sisera's chariots:
 1. Moses' address to Israel at Deuteronomy 20:1a had directed her warriors not to be afraid when seeing an enemy chariot army or seeing that the enemy outnumbered them, for God was with them to help them.
 2. Indeed, Moses added in Deuteronomy 20:1b that Israel's warriors were to recall that the Lord had saved them from Egypt when He had destroyed Pharaoh's chariots in the Red Sea, Exodus 14:21-30.
- IV. **Thus, due to Barak's weak faith in God, Deborah reported that she would surely go with him, but that the honor of slaying Sisera would go to a woman instead of Barak, Judges 4:9.**
- V. **Barak's missed opportunity for honor is highlighted in how God helped Israel defeat Sisera's chariots:**
 - A. In Exodus 14:25, God brought rain on the Egyptians to set them up for defeat, Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to Ex. 14:25. Psalm 77:16-17 explains the Lord sent a severe rain storm on the Egyptians while they were in the sea bed, soaking the ground and explaining their trouble driving their chariots. Thus, when God had Moses stretch his rod over the sea to close it, the Egyptians were cornered into being destroyed, Ex. 14:26-30.
 - B. In Judges 4:15 as noted in the Judges 5:20-22 song, God also sent rain to set Sisera's chariots up for defeat:
 1. When Sisera arrived at the Kishon River to face Israel's men ten miles away across the Plain of Esdraelon at Mount Tabor to the northeast, knowing his chariots would be useless on Mount Tabor, Sisera lined his chariots up along the Kishon River's northern bank (Judges 4:7). He intended to lure Israel's men to come down from Mount Tabor and cross the open plain toward him for Sisera's chariots to have the advantage.

2. Actually, God was the One Who had lured Sisera into a trap: when Barak heeded Deborah and led Israel's foot soldiers to descend Mount Tabor and head toward Sisera (Judges 4:14), Judges 5:20-22 reports God sent a great storm on Sisera's chariots, its runoff flooding the Kishon and the southern part of the Plain of Esdraelon, making it difficult for Sisera's horses to maneuver and giving Israel's soldiers the advantage. [The "heavy run-off in connection with spring rains, combined with a flat, marshy topography made this river a substantial barrier to travel and military activity for a part of the year." (Z. P. E. B., v. Three, p. 829) Indeed, Napoleon defeated the Turks in the same spot in 1799 when a heavy downpour left the terrain very difficult for the horses to maneuver on the battlefield, *Ibid.*, Ryrie, fn. to Judges 4:15.]
 - C. After the defeat of the chariot armies in both cases, a song was sung: in Exodus 15:1-21, Moses who led the event led the song and his sister Miriam helped him but in Judges 5:1, Deborah led the song and Barak helped her, for Barak did not have the honor since he had exhibited only a partial faith in the Lord! (Judges 4:8-9)
 - D. Also, God's victory over Pharaoh's and Sisera's chariots taught both of Israel's foes that He was the true God:
 1. Exodus 14:4, 25 shows the fall of Pharaoh's army taught the Egyptians that Israel's God was the true God.
 2. Mount Carmel where the Kishon River empties into the Mediterranean Sea was believed by the Canaanite Phoenicians to be the sacred dwelling of their storm god, Baal (B. K. C., O. T., p. 526; Z. P. E. B., v. One, p. 432), so God's use of an area storm to set up Sisera's Canaanite chariots for defeat by the Kishon River of all places revealed to the Canaanites that Israel's God and not Baal was the true God!
- VI. As God's prophetess Deborah predicted, a woman was given the honor of slaying Sisera, Judges 4:17-22:**
- A. The enemy Canaanite general Sisera left his chariot in the quagmire and fled on foot to the tent of a presumed ally in Heber, a Kenite. Heber's wife, Jael, who was home, offered to hide Sisera in the tent, Judges 4:17-18.
 - B. Sisera was thirsty, so Jael took pains not to get him just water, but to open a skin container of milk and give it to him to make him drowsy and then to cover him so Sisera would get warm and fall sleep, Jud. 4:19-20 NIV.
 - C. When Sisera thus fell fast asleep, Jael, a nomadic woman who was responsible for pitching her tent and was an expert in using a tent peg and mallet, took a peg and swiftly, powerfully drove it into Sisera's temples, pinning his head to the ground and killing him, Judges 4:21; *Ibid.*, Ryrie, fn. to Judges 4:21.
 - D. When Barak who was pursuing Sisera came by Jael's tent, she summoned him to see Sisera's body where she had slain him, so Jael gained the honor of slaying the enemy general, Judges 4:22; 5:24-26.

Lesson: *For failing to heed God's precedents of providing victory over chariot armies in Israel's past and for failing to heed Scripture at Deuteronomy 20:1a,b, choosing rather to rely on the woman Deborah for support, Barak was granted victory over Sisera's forces, but a woman gained the honor of slaying Sisera himself.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ to be saved, John 3:16. (2) As men, if we are tempted to be intimidated from assuming courageous spiritual leadership, may we (a) recall God's precedents of victory for godly men and (b) the Bible's directives to (c) trust and heed God to do His will. (3) As women, may we heed the Lord in our lives, and like Deborah of old encourage Christian men around us to heed God's precedents and Word and do His will.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

In our introduction, we noted Ken Ham's observation about the failure of many Christian leaders across America to have the courage to take Biblical stands out of fear of reprisals from people in the pew.

To apply this message, (1) we note that God directs leaders to heed His Word in view of their accountability not to the congregation, but to the Lord Himself at Christ's return (2 Timothy 3:15-4:2). We men must then revere so as to obey the Lord as revealed in the Scriptures above all pressures to the contrary by other people around us.

(2) Also, we have the exemplary leadership precedent of Martin Luther. Though Luther's theology was affected by errant Roman Catholic elements that fundamentalist Christians today know Scripture opposes, James Atkinson in The Great Light: Luther and Reformation, 1968, p. 15 reports of credible things Luther did that we can mimic in our era. Specifically, "Two things he [Luther] learnt from his visit to Rome. First . . . that Rome had lost the keys to the kingdom . . . Second, he learnt what it was to stand alone against the majority. Both lessons gave him an enormous spiritual advance, he strengthened his integrity and increased his authority." Thus, though Ken Ham reports that many Christian leaders compromise trying to please their hearers, they only weaken their leadership. Rather, according to Scripture at 2 Timothy 3:15-4:2 and the precedent of Martin Luther whom God used in his era to begin to clarify the gospel from the darkness of the Middle Ages, we men must stand for what is right even if doing so means standing against the majority. Doing so will enhance our integrity and increase our authority.

May we trust in Christ to be saved. Then, may we learn and heed the lessons of Deborah and Barak.