

## HEBREWS CHAPTER 11 – HEROES OF FAITH

### Lesson #15

### BARAK Hebrews 11:32

***“And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets....”***

In Hebrews 11:32 there are six heroes of faith named. The first four are:  
First, Gideon – by faith defeated the Midianites. Judges chapter 6 & 7;  
Second, Barak – by faith defeated the Canaanites. Judges chapter 4 & 5;  
Third, Samson - by faith defeated the Philistines. Judges chapters 13-16;  
Fourth, Jephthah - by faith defeated the Ammonites. Judges 11:1-40.

In the preceding lesson we studied the exploits of Gideon whom God used to defeat the Midianites. Barak is involved in yet another miraculous delivery of Israel from enemy domination. As we shall see, he was only one of several persons who are prominent in the story. Other persons in the story are:

Jabin: who was a tyrannical King in Canaan;

Deborah: a Jewish prophetess and Judge;

Sisera: who was the captain of Jabin’s army;

Jael: the second woman in the story;

Jehovah: Who was in control behind the scenes;

Then, of course, there was Barak: who was the Jewish general, the subject of this study.

Barak is one of the obscure Heroes of Faith whose venture of faith is not widely known but which God includes in the Honorable Mention section of the Hall of Faith. In the Hebrew, the name Barak means “lightning bolt” and Deborah means “honeybee.” If writing a novel based upon this story, a good title would be, “The Adventures of Lightning Bolt And Honeybee.”

After reading the story in Judges chapters 4 and 5, it is surprising that Barak is mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11 and the woman Deborah is not, even though she seems to be more of a major player in this story than her General, Barak. However, God, the Holy Spirit, the Author of the Holy Scriptures, no doubt had a purpose in mind for including him in this list.

Let us examine this episode in the history of Israel as follows:

### **I. ISRAEL’S HARDSHIP THAT WAS INTOLERABLE. Judges 4:1-3**

Israel was in captivity in the land which they were supposed to capture – Canaan. This was not what they envisioned. There are a number of questions that are answered in the first 3 verses of Judges chapter 4:

#### **A. When Their Captivity? Judges 4:1 – “When Ehud was dead....”**

The litany of Israel’s losses is long.

- **Judges 3:7** “So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God....” ; **Judges 3:9** “When the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the children of Israel, who delivered them: Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother.....”

- **Judges 3:12** “And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD strengthened Eglon king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD.....” **Judges 3:15** “But when the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for them: Ehud....”
- **Judges 3:31** “After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed six hundred men of the Philistines with an ox goad; and he also delivered Israel.....”
- **Judges 4:1** “When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD.” So the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan....”

There was repeated relapse and repentance. The pattern was all too familiar: “The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Jehovah”; then, “the children of Israel cried out to Jehovah.” God was merciful and raised up a leader who, with God’s miraculous involvement, delivered His people time after time.

Does that sound like anyone you know today? How often do we sin and call out to God in repentance! Thank God that “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9) When we turn away from sin and face the Lord, crying out to Him for help, God hears us. God helps us when we repent of our sin and cry out to Him for deliverance.

### **B. By Whom Were They Captive?**

Judges 4:2 “So the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera....”

### **C. For How Long Were They Captives?**

Judges 4:3 tells us that for twenty long years the Israelites suffered ruthless oppression under the rule of Jabin, king of Hazor. They were kept under control by the commander, Sisera. This military tyrant commanded a large army that included 900 chariots.

### **D. What Were The Conditions In Captivity?**

Israel was in a pathetic state at the time God raised up Deborah to judge for Him. In chapter 5 of Judges we have “The Song of Deborah and Barak” which was sung after God gave them victory over Jabin and his general, Sisera. From this song we get some idea of the deplorable conditions that existed. We read: “In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were deserted, and the travelers walked along the byways. Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel, until I, Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel. They chose new gods; there was war in the gates; Not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel.” (Judges 5:6-8)

That gives us some idea of the suffering Israel endured. Caravan roads were in danger, traffic almost ceased; the crops were plundered . The fighting men in Israel were disarmed, a shield was not to be seen nor a spear among forty thousand men. No one had weapons, no one was prepared for battle. Jabin and his 900 chariots of iron therefore, would have been seen as an impossible force to overcome.

But the people of Israel were not just militarily weak, they were spiritually pathetic as well.

Deborah and Barak lived in a time of great spiritual and moral declension, just as we do! Do we cry out to God for victory over the forces of evil and the foes of righteousness? II Chron. 7:14 is still in the Bible: "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

## II. DEBORAH'S LEADERSHIP THAT WAS INSPIRING.

Spurgeon wrote: "God uses all classes and both sexes for his work. In this case a man plays a very secondary part, and two women share the honor. One strikes the first blow, and the other the last." (Morning And Evening Devotions) Deborah struck the first blow in the war of independence.

### A. Deborah the Governess. Judges 4:4-5

"Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment."

Deborah was one of the 13 Judges that ruled Israel in the period before Kings began to lead Israel. She was also a Prophetess. Several women served as prophetesses throughout the Bible: Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14), Anna (Luke 2:36).

### B. Deborah And God.

God raised up this courageous woman, Deborah, to deliver His people in one of the lowest periods of Israel's history. The prophets of the Old Testament served as spokesmen for God, spokesmen who delivered God's messages to the people. Deborah received a message from God for the man Barak, who served as her General over a bedraggled and rather helpless core of Israeli troops.

### C. Deborah And Her General.

Deborah sounded the call for a war of independence that God had instructed her to initiate and informed Barak that he was to lead. Barak was hesitant to attempt such a seemingly impossible task until Deborah encouraged him and fired up his faith so that he agreed to undertake the mission.

Our faith can infect someone else's faith, stimulate another's faith, encourage another's faith, inspire faith in someone else. Deborah had a contagious faith. Barak was positively impacted by Deborah's faith. She inspired in him faith to attempt great things for God. And yet, she is not mentioned in Hebrews 11.

Behind the public ministry of many a servant of the Lord there is the private prayer and devoted service of a wife who never comes into the public eye, or of a shut-in prayer warrior. They may not get the recognition on earth but God keeps the records and no deed done for Him will go unrewarded.

Deborah was a woman, and she could not lead a mighty army into battle. What could she do?

She could inspire someone else, a soldier, with the faith to do it. Faith was needed if Jabin's hosts, under the command of Sisera, were to be overthrown, and Deborah had that faith.

### III. BARAK'S GENERALSHIP THAT WAS INVOLVED.

Israel had no standing army. To launch an attack would require the marshalling of an army which would take some time. To accomplish this task required strong and competent leadership. Barak was the man of the hour, just as Deborah was the woman of the hour.

#### A. The Commander By Whom Barak Was Recruited.

##### 1. *Barak was inducted by God.* v.6a

Through the Prophetess Deborah, God sent a message to Barak saying, "Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded, 'Go and deploy troops....'"

##### 2. *Barak was instructed by God.* v.6b

"Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men...."

##### 3. *Barak was informed by God of victory.* v.7

".... against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hand...."

#### A. The Company That Barak Required. v.8

"And Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!"

To conscript untrained and unarmed men and convince them that they could defeat a well armed army that had 900 iron chariots would take a great motivator. Barak wanted Deborah with him for the Prophetess could help convince men that this mission was indeed God's will.

#### B. The Compliance That Barak Received. v.9

"So she said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh."

Barak did not expect Deborah to fight but her presence with him would send the strongest message to those whom he was trying to recruit, that this venture had the approval of God and the authority of Deborah the Judge behind him.

Faith has to have feet. Deborah motivated Barak to put feet to his faith. Barak, like Gideon, showed some weakness of faith at first. Deborah rebuked Barak's timidity saying, "the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." (v.9) That would bring out Barak's ego, if not his faith!

Barak assembled 10,000 men to undertake the task of fighting against the mighty and massive force of Sisera who was the Commander-in-chief of the combined forces of the Canaanites. The odds were incredible. Humanly speaking there was no way that Barak could conquer Sisera and his forces.

Barak, accompanied by Deborah, rushed to the summit of Mt. Tabor. This location was very favorable to the poorly armed Israelites in warding off the danger of the well-armed enemy. The wooded slopes protected them against the chariots of the Canaanites. Mount Tabor rises from the plain of Esdraelon, about 1,865 ft. above the sea, and its broad top of nearly a mile in circumference afforded a strong position, out of reach of Sisera's chariots.

Now the battle lines are drawn. Barak and his handful of troops are on the high ground on Mt. Tabor. Sisera and his mighty army is poised in the valley below. From the purely human perspective Barak and his army could not win. They were outnumbered and under equipped.

That situation reminds us of the tremendous odds that we Christians face in the mission God has placed us in the world to accomplish. However, I Corinthians chapter 1 has these encouraging words for us: "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence." (I Cor. 1:26-29)

#### **IV. GOD'S PARTNERSHIP THAT WAS INVALUABLE.**

Part of William Cowper's poem reads: "God moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform."

When we study some of the divine deliverances in the Old Testament we see some of the wonders He performs in mysterious ways. One of those ways and wonders is seen in this story in Judges chapter 4.

##### **A. The Scene.**

The scene is set: Barak and his 10,000 man and one woman army was up on top of Mt. Tabor; Sisera and his mighty army and iron chariots were down in the valley below the mountain. Down there was the little stream Kishon, which was normally a dry riverbed. It was now the campground for Sisera's army with chariots and horses.

Barak launched the attack. In fact, he himself led the charge down the mountainside of Mt. Tabor with his 10,000 troops following behind. Twice we are told that Barak "pursued" – "Barak pursued the chariots" (4:16) and "Barak pursued Sisera" (4:22). Once Deborah got Barak started he was hard to stop! He had the perseverance that comes with faith.

##### **B. The Storm.**

There is no indication that Barak knew what God was going to do. All he knew was that God had said "Go!" and down the mountain he went leading his army. Then it happened: at some point, the Lord miraculously sent a sudden downpour that caused the river to quickly overflow and turn the battlefield into a sea of mud. Such conditions caused the chariots and horse soldiers to bog down and become useless. The enemy was thrown into utter confusion and panic, and they were soon routed, fleeing for their lives from the pursuing Israelites. The enemy General, Sisera, fled on foot. The army of the enemy was defeated; not a single soldier was left.

Chapter 4 is not clear on the details of battle. But chapter 5, verse 21 fills us in on some details: “The stars from their courses fought against Sisera. The torrent of Kishon swept them away, That ancient torrent, the torrent of Kishon. O, my soul, march on in strength!”

This is how God Himself subdued or controlled the enemy in behalf of the Israelites. The enemy had been destroyed and the Israelites delivered by the miraculous, powerful act of God through the rainstorm.

### **C. *The Sequel.***

How this scene must have emboldened the army of the Israelites who remembered stories of the chariots of Pharaoh, sinking into the mud at the bottom of the Red Sea. Sisera trusted in His chariots of iron and these were the very things that brought his entire army to destruction.

The Psalmist wrote “Some boast in chariots and some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the LORD, our God.” (Psalm 20:7)

Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.” (2 Cor 10:3-4)

There is a saying, “Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.” That does not apply to everything. It does not apply to putting all of our faith in God! Putting all our faith in God will never bring disappointment; will never be misplaced or wasted.

One clear lesson for us at this point is this: God will deliver us, from our enemies. But there are two prerequisites, two things that we must do before we can be delivered: we must repent and call upon the Lord. This experience of Israel teaches us this. They were not delivered until they had repented and called upon the Lord. So it is with us. Once we turn away from our sin and evil, God delivers us.

But note this fact: it is God and God alone who can deliver us from life’s enemies. No matter what the problem or difficulty is, God has the power to give us victory over any enemy that seeks to oppress and destroy us.

### **V. Jael’s WORKMANSHIP THAT WAS INVASIVE.**

Deborah said that Barak would win, but Sisera would be killed by a woman. Barak may have thought that Deborah was referring to herself and that she would kill Sisera. However, that wasn’t how it happened. It happened like this:

Sisera’s chariots got stuck in the mud and he ran and sought refuge in the tent of a woman named Jael. Sisera was thirsty and Jael gave him milk to drink and he fell asleep from tiredness. Then she pounded a tent peg through his head.

Barak had been in hot pursuit of Sisera. As he approached the tent of Jael, he discovered that she had assassinated Sisera. Deborah’s prediction had come true: it was not Barak and not Deborah, but a woman named Jael, who had executed the enemy commander. She was to receive the honor as his executioner, not the commander Barak. Jael had nailed him!

Some newspaper headlines about the incident might have been as follows:

“Sisera Gets Pegged!”

“Jael Hit the Nail on The Head”

“Sisera Gets The Point”

“Jael Was Not A Preacher, But She Hammered Home The Point!”

“Sisera Finally Gets Nailed!”

What a strange victory! God used two women, a jug of milk, a hammer, a tent peg and a storm to defeat the enemy. This story is a little bizarre to say the least.

One person’s faith and obedience can make a difference in history. Faith in God makes the difference between defeat and victory. The Israelites recovered their independence, and finally broke the Canaanites power over them.

#### SUMMATION

The story of the defeat of the Canaanites under the prophetic leadership of Deborah and the military leadership of Barak, is related in prose in chapter 4 and repeated in poetry in chapter 5. Chapter 5 is known as the *Song of Deborah* but it is a duet, for both Deborah and Barak sing it as verse 1 indicates: “Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day.” In it Jael is extolled as the heroine, the “most blessed of women” (5:24). It adds, “So may all Your enemies perish, O Lord!” (5:31).

The satire continues; verses 24-27 read: “Most blessed among women is Jael, The wife of Heber The Kenite; Blessed is she among women in tents. He asked for water, she gave milk; She brought out cream in a lordly bowl. She stretched her hand to the tent peg, her right hand to the workmen’s hammer; she pounded Sisera, she pierced his head, she split and struck through his temple. At her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still; at her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell dead.”

Not one verse of Deborah’s song talks of the efforts of the army—God is given full credit for defeating a superior force.

#### CONCLUSION

What can we apply to our life situations from this amazing story? There are several truths that should stick to the walls of our minds:

1. *It is amazing what God can do through persons who do not seek the glory for themselves.* Barak was told beforehand that he would not get the credit – that a woman would. He decided not to concern himself with who was getting the credit but rather focused on what was important: winning the battle.

2. *God can use my faith to stimulate someone else’s faith.*

How strong is your faith? Is your faith strong enough to inspire faith in someone else? Can

you think of someone whose faith has infected and inspired you?

3. *God doesn't always do things the way we assume He will.* "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD." (Isaiah 55:8) Isn't it wonderful that God is full of surprises? That truth keeps us in a posture of trust, waiting to see what God is going to do next. Certainly Jesus, the Messiah, did not come in the way the Jews would have expected. They expected the 'Lion Of Judah' not the 'Lamb Of God'!

4. *Where God guides He provides.*

When God guided Barak to leave the mountain top of Mt. Tabor and descend into the valley of conflict his faith did not falter. He knew God would provide. In our troubles, in our valleys of life, our faith must not falter. We must not forget that: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death" He is there with me" – He, the Lord our Shepherd!

5. *God can make a way when there seems to be no way.*

When we face battles of illnesses, difficult personal relationships, opposition by unbelievers, emotional issues, trials of various sorts and in general the struggle to maintain our faith in an unbelieving world, we too can overcome through Christ who loves us! He can make a way when there seems to be no way.

6. *Don't forget to praise God for every victory won!*

After the great battle was over and Israel was free, the people did not hesitate to glorify God. They blessed God by singing a song of praise to Him for what He had done. We may not hesitate to go to God in our times of need, but do we do as Deborah and Barak did and praise God for answered prayer and victories won?

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