

Judges 08-02-15b

Let's resume our study now in the book of Judges. We're at chapter 4. We have noted the incursion to the south that was met by Othniel. We have noted the incursion in the center that was met by Ehud.

We have noted the incursion in the southwest that was met by Shamgar. Shamgar of course is a single line. He isn't listed with the major judges.

It doesn't say that he judged Israel. It says he delivered Israel. But this was a deterrent.

It was a suppressing influence on the Philistines. It held them in check. And there are a couple of additional principles that you can observe here.

One is you get the idea that Shamgar didn't set out to lead a national movement. He didn't consider himself to be someone who was going to rally the troops like Othniel and go lead a great campaign. He simply did what needed doing with what he had in his hand.

But God used it. And I'm sure he had no idea when he ran out of patience and started whacking Philistines with this ox goad that it was going to be something set down in the eternal pages of scripture and something that God would use to deliver the entire nation. But this reprimand, this unexpected defeat for the Philistines slowed them down and made them think twice before they made further assaults on the land.

And it is a reminder that the small battles that we win and the decisions made by faith in our daily lives, doing what we need to do and taking whatever steps are necessary to be sure that we are in the will and plan and purpose of God can have repercussions far beyond what we would imagine. We think, well, does it really make a difference if I have peace in my soul or not as I slug through some of these difficulties? Does it make a difference if I can hold my tongue or not? Does it make a difference if I hold to the course, if I operate by faith and I don't fall back on a human expedient? It might be the way of the world to do things a certain way and I'm not going to do that because I'm a believer. Nobody's looking.

Nobody's going to see the difference. I'm figuring my taxes. Someone offers me an opportunity and says, hey, you know, you can do this.

And you think, well, wait a minute. That's really not legitimate. That's kind of a cheat.

That's kind of a slide-by. That's really against the rules. Oh, but everybody does it.

And we think, no, I'm a believer and I have responsibility to function in integrity. Whether anybody's looking or not, whether anybody is harmed or not, it's a matter of God is looking. And I want to be pleasing in God's sight.

I want to operate by faith. God will take care of me if I don't get double the credit or double this

or extra that by taking advantage of a mistake or a loophole. We think, well, it's small.

It's insignificant. It probably doesn't count. But Jesus said, he who is faithful in that which is least will be faithful also in that which is much.

And there is an implication in that promise, because how could you get the opportunity to be faithful in that which is much unless you are given much? And those who are given much are the ones who are faithful in that which is least. God doesn't say, well, if you're faithful in that which is least, I'll just keep on giving you the least so that you continue to be faithful. He says you learn to be faithful in these small, seemingly insignificant things.

You have been faithful in a few things. I will make you ruler over many things. Because God is looking for the habit of faith, the dedication to faith, the practice of faith, the habit of obedience, the dedication to obedience, the practice of obedience.

And when we hone and sharpen our perception and our operation in these small things, it prepares us for big things. I am always reminded of this when it comes to child training. You try to teach your children, you know, clean up after yourself.

Remember where your stuff is. Keep it with you. Pick up, you know, because later on it's not just going to be your toy that you left out when it should have been put away.

It's not just going to be your toothbrush that you forgot to bring, but it's okay because you're a guest and they've got a spare. Later on, as you get older, your habit of organization or your habit of forgetfulness is going to have greater and greater consequences. Well, the same is true in our spiritual life.

And Shamgar is an example of dedication. It's an isolated incursion. The 600 Philistines is not an invasion.

This was a raid. This was an incursion. But Shamgar stopped it with his domestic implement, and God used this to deliver the entire nation and to put it in his word as a reminder to us that faithful in small things, whether we think it's significant or not, can make a big difference in God's plan.

Well, then we move into chapter 4, and it says, "...the Israelites again did evil in the Lord's sight. So the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who dwelled in Harosheth Hagoyim." We've got some names here.

Jabin, his name is a Semitic name, although he's not an Israelite. But these Canaanites are in the ancient Near East. A lot of these have cognate meanings.

And Jabin comes from the ancient Semitic root, bin, which is a verb, B-I-N or B-I-Y-N, actually. Yabin is taken from that verb, and bin means to discern. So Jabin, or the discerning one, the

smart guy, he's sharp.

He's got his wits about him. And so God allows Israel to fall under the power of this wise guy. Now it says king of Canaan.

Canaan is kind of a generic term. Where is Canaan? He's not the king of the entire land. He is a king in Canaan, and specifically in Hazor.

This is a city-state situation. And if you look on your map, you'll see approximately where this is. It's up in the hills to the north, and so having covered the south and the middle and the southwest, we're now up in the north.

The commander of his army was Sisera, who dwelled in Harosheth Hagoim. You can probably recognize an element of that place name. What do you notice in the first part of it? Harosheth.

What's right at the center of that? If you take Ha, which is the word the in Hebrew, and the eth, which is a plural, what's right in the middle? Rosh. Rosh means the head, the chief, the leader, the highest or preeminent. Rosh is the head.

What's in the middle of the second word if you take out Ha and Im, which is the article and the plural? Goy. This is the smart guy, and his general is head of the nations, chief of the nations, dominator of the nations. These guys have got grandiose credentials, grandiose accomplishments.

They're wise and they're strong. Rosh, meaning the head of something, has the idea that you're in charge, you've got the authority, you've got the domination. So Sisera here dominates, the place name, his little mini capital there, he's the dominator of the nations.

So they've got the brains and they've got the military power. It's sort of an unstoppable force, very dismal, very hopeless to fall under this grip. They look around today, think about what faces Christians in our day and age.

You've got science with all of its wisdom and all of its explanations and all of its sneering, condescending attitude and, well, your God is just the God of the gaps. Your God is only left to explain what science has not explained. And as we explain more and more things, your God shrinks and becomes smaller and smaller because you just use him to fill in what we don't already know.

And science, the very name, speaks of knowledge. The motto of the Naval Academy is Ex Scientia Tridents, which from knowledge, tridents, sea power. Our sea power is based on knowledge.

We learn, we go to the Naval Academy, we learn about center of mass and center of flotation and all of the principles of steam propulsion and nuclear propulsion and all the different engineering things. And from this knowledge, we get our sea power. We implement our naval

force all over the world.

Ex Scientia, from knowledge. Well, this guy is smart. He represents earthly wisdom, earthly know-how, earthly skillfulness.

Yabin, the commander, Sisera, dwells in Harosheth Hagoyim. And both of these are plural. You know, the heads of the nations.

And the children of Israel cried out to the Lord for Yabin had 900 chariots of iron. This is domination. This is subjugation.

This is inferiority by the Israelites. When they look, they see no hope. We can't outsmart this guy.

We can't outfight this guy. We can't outproduce this guy. We can't, you know, how are we possibly going to get out from under this scourge? 900 chariots of iron.

And for 20 years, he had harshly oppressed the children of Israel. Harshly oppressed the children of Israel. So, they cried out.

And isn't it interesting that God's purpose is accomplished? When enough discipline and enough oppression hits God's people, they will turn. Turn you at my reproof, for why will you die, O house of Israel? Turn ye at my reproof. All day long, God holds out His hands to disobedient, stiff-necked people.

Sometimes He has to hold out His hands and grab something or whack them and then hold out His hands and then whack them harder and then hold out His hands and eventually we smarten up and turn. So, after 20 years of oppression, you think about this. Suppose oppression for us started today.

So, we would finally wake up and cry out to God in the year 2028? Is that right? I have a strong expectation that the whole scenario may be over by 2028, but that's how long it would take. Two decades. If people were just now turning, this would be an oppression that started back in 1988 and went all through the late 80s and into the 90s and into the aughts.

Well, 20 years they suffer under this oppression. He had harshly oppressed the children of Israel for 20 years when they started crying out. Now, Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at the time.

Lappidoth, this has the idea of illumination. It's a word associated with lamps, light, this kind of thing. She is not given in terms of her antecedents, her parents, but she is married to a man named Lappidoth, a man named Mr. Bright.

Bright guy. Brightman. Mr. Brightman.

She is Mrs. Brightman. She is a prophetess. There are only a few prophetesses mentioned in

the scripture, I think four total.

Deborah is perhaps the most prominent of these. It doesn't say how she came to be a prophetess, how she came to be acknowledged as a prophetess. It just sort of offers it as a given.

She first began as a judge, once again analyzing situations, making decisions, implementing policy and so on. She is sitting under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. Ephraim is north.

This is sort of the southern part of the northern kingdom. This is eight or ten miles north of Jerusalem. Interestingly, she is under the palm tree of Deborah.

You get the idea that this tree probably got its name from her. There are some inklings that well, could this have been the maid of one of the patriarchal wives, but I doubt that it had any notoriety until she sat under it and it basically became her place. So she held court up there and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

Now why would they do this? She is a prophetess. What distinguishes her from, say, a man or a city court or the elders that would sit in the gate of a local town? Well, she seems to have a line to God and there is sort of a superstition. Now she had been judging all along, but the people are not that interested in God, so you almost get the idea that this is kind of a mystical respect.

They don't respect her out of actual faith in God and actual looking for God's will and God's determination. These are the local disputes, local court cases and things, but it is kind of like the Pharisees' respect for John the Baptist. They don't agree with him and they don't believe in him, but whoa, there is something going on there.

They don't quite know what it is, but hey, let's do this. And we will find confirmation of this idea that it is not genuine faith involved as we go forward. Now, how usual is it for a woman to be offering judgments and sort of binding decisions in a court environment in a patriarchal society? How often does that happen? When has it ever happened in Biblical history prior to this? What woman has ever rendered judgment? Did Miriam hold court when they were in the wilderness? Did Sarah have a court? Did Rebecca have a court? Did Rachel or Leah or any of the other patriarchal wives? Did Tamar set up afterward and she rendered judgments on behalf of them? There is none of this.

This is kind of a first. What is the model in Israel for decision making? Where does the authority repose? Where is the delegated authority of God in Israel? Who is supposed to be leading Israel? What did Moses set up? Did Moses go along and say, find me the wise women of Israel and let me have a court of the women here and we will have judgments. When Hobab or Jethro or Ruel or whatever you want to call them came back and said, man, you are trying to make all these decisions yourself.

You need to delegate. What was the system that was set up? It is elders. Who did God call to

Mount Sinai to see the throne in the midst of the glassy sea? Who went up there? Who is accountable for speaking on behalf of the people and representing the people before God and representing God before the people? Who did Joshua call when it was time to apportion the land? Who are the authorities in Israel who are charged with the responsibility for making these decisions? It is the elders of the tribes of Israel.

It is the elders of the clans of Israel. It is the elders of the families of Israel and they are all men. Now, why would Deborah suddenly become a source of decisions and judgments in Israel? Well, nature abhors a vacuum.

There was no judging. There was no decision making. Everything had descended into squabbling and contention and strife and bickering and nobody would acknowledge or respect or abide by the decisions of anybody else.

The fabric of Israelite society had decayed and degenerated and degraded in the to the point that the elder system no longer worked. No respect for authority. No implementation.

No shouldering of that authority. The function of elders in Israel in this area is gone. It's not functioning.

How do I know that? If it were functioning, Deborah would not be judging Israel. She wouldn't say, well, excuse me, senior man of the tribe of Ephraim, but I'm a prophetess, so step aside, I'll take this over. It's because nobody else would do it.

And the only sway, the only authority that anybody recognizes is this sort of spooky mystical, wow, she gets oracles from God from time to time, so I'll respect that out of superstition and out of mysticism and I'll abide by that because I could have some bad luck. It would be bad karma to go against the decision of Deborah. So this appears to be the situation.

The elders are non-functional. There is no leadership. There is no male shouldering of this God-given responsibility and it is a rebuke.

It is a sign to Israel that the only place they can get a decision made is by a woman whose task is not to judge Israel and not to prophesy. Where are the male prophets in Israel? Evidently, God cannot find a man. There's not a single man in Israel qualified to be a prophet.

God wants to send a prophetic message. He's got to find somebody and here is a woman who is faithful and God says, you know what? Faith trumps any other consideration. I will use a person of faith.

I don't care what their gender is. I don't have to use a man, but I have to use someone with faith. I have to use someone who can be obedient, someone who will step up and that's how Deborah ends up being a prophetess.

Anytime you find prophetesses, you find a low point in Israel's history where there aren't men

to do the job. The men have failed and it is a rebuke and it is a disgrace and it is an indictment of that generation. Nothing against women.

Women have their place, but they are not assigned. This would be the same as when do you end up with a corporal commanding a company or a corporal commanding an artillery battery? It's when there are no officers and no senior enlisted left to do that job. They are either dead or disabled and it is no disgrace and it's nothing against corporals that they normally do not command companies and batteries.

Corporals are an essential part of every military organization and they have their role and their place, but it is not to command. But there have been times when a corporal ends up being a company commander because there isn't anybody else to do it. In many cases they have done a really superior job and have covered themselves with glory and been decorated and been memorialized for stepping in.

But no corporal says, what I have really wanted all along is to command the company. There is a dire need. So Deborah a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, Mr. Brightman, Mr. Torchman, Mr. Lampman.

Where is Lapidoth? Why wasn't he a guy that could be a prophet or be a judge? For whatever reason he is staying home baking the bread while Deborah goes to work. She is judging Israel at that time. She sat under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel.

Now, it is no accident that these two towns are mentioned. What is Bethel? We have seen this before. Bethel keeps coming back to haunt Israel.

Bethel, this is the house of God. This is the place where Jacob first saw the ladder and acknowledged God and committed himself to God. What is Bethel? This is the place that Ramah is famous for.

Well, we know from later scripture that there is a voice of weeping. A voice is heard in Ramah, Rachel, weeping for her children and she could not be comforted. Between Ramah and Bethel here is a reminder that God called Jacob as he called Isaac before him and Abraham before him.

The patriarchs of Israel are not Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel. I am the God of Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel. You just don't hear that.

It is very politically incorrect and it is very atrocious of me to point out that God forever and always identifies himself to Israel. I am the God of your fathers. I am the Father.

Someone was trying to tell my daughter that the Bible is really not clear on the gender of God. Please, have you read the thing? Have you bothered to read any of the books of the Bible? Jesus did not say, when you pray, pray thusly. Our mother who art in heaven or our father mother God who art in heaven.

He does not identify himself as the wife of Israel in the Old Testament. He says, I am the husband. You are my wayward wife and I am taking you back even though you have been unfaithful.

He is uniformly throughout the scripture given the masculine plural of majesty. All of the pronouns referring to him are masculine. Do I really have to point this out? God said, in the garden Eve was deceived.

If it had been the other way around, men could be having the babies and women would be going out earning the bread by the sweat of their brow. But that is not how it is. I am sorry if it offends people's sensibilities but it is not a matter of value.

It is not a matter of lesser and greater quality or lesser and greater value. It is a matter of assigned function. There are men who are assigned certain functions.

Women are assigned certain functions. Those functions are equally important. It is not less important or less valuable to be a woman and fulfill a woman's function any more than it is less important to be an enlisted man and fulfill an enlisted man's functions rather than being an officer.

Officers are useless if you don't have any enlisted men. Men are useless if you don't have any women. There are complementary roles.

Neither one is superior or inferior but there is a hierarchy of accountability. With accountability goes responsibility and with responsibility goes authority. The man has authority because he has accountability and he has responsibility for the woman.

The woman complements, supports, fulfills, is the help that is to meet. That is just the way it is. If it is old-fashioned, I am sorry, it is as old-fashioned as the beginning of human history.

So this is odd. This is weird. This is very topsy-turvy to the mind of any Israelite to read this story and say, what? A woman was a prophet? A woman was judging? What is up with this? So she sent and called for Barak, the son of Barak, the son of Barak, the son of Abinoam from Kadesh in Naphtali.

Now, Abinoam is real similar to Ahinoam, the wife of David. You may recall her name was Ahinoam. And Ahi, Noam, talks about my brother is pleasant or pleasing.

And Abi, Noam, Avi, my father. Now, this is a very interesting story. My father is pleasant or I am the father of pleasantness or something of that ilk.

Barak is said to mean lightning. It is a strange thing that Deborah is sending for Barak. A woman is sending for a man from Kadesh in Naphtali.

If you look at your tribal map, you can see where the area of Naphtali is and where Kadesh is. She says to him, has not the Lord God of Israel commanded, go and deploy at Mount Tabor.

Take with you ten elephants of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun.

And 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. God is arranging for the enemy to meet Barak. God says, I am going to bring the enemy against you so that I may slaughter him.

It is kind of a scary thing. God is bringing the enemy, arranging him against them at this specific place in time. So Barak, mighty man of valor, says, as the Lord hath said, so I will do.

And behold, he went and gathered up the troops and headed up to the Kishon. He says, Lady, I need you to go with me or I am not going. If you will not go with me, I will not go.

Now, ostensibly, God has chosen the most hearty and faithful man left in the area to go fight this battle. And this is the measure of his courage. This is a far cry from Shamgar.

This is a far cry from Ehud or Othniel. Barak, oh mighty man of valor, well, if I can hide behind your skirts, I will go. But if you do not show up... And why is this? Because people view Deborah as this sort of lucky charm, sort of a talisman.

There is a superstitious mystical belief that there is something special about Deborah. Not something special about God or his word or his plan or his promises to Israel. But she has got this sort of spooky connection with powers beyond.

And so, well, if you are there, I will go. My faith extends as far as you being there. Because I think you have got this kind of spooky power.

But just to go because you say God tells me to go, I am not going. So this is the mighty Barak. Barak said to her, if you will go with me, then I will go.

But if you will not go, I will not go. So she said, I will indeed 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. Do you think this would have been the response if Barak had said, yes sir, three bags full. If this is the word of God, I am ready.

Point me at the enemy. Here we go. This prophecy, this prediction is another rebuke for the men of Israel.

All of the men, not just Barak, but all of the men who go with him, none of them are going to be given the privilege of slaying the leader who comes from Hirosheth Hagoyim. He will be delivered into the hand of a woman. He will sell Sisera into the hand.

We keep seeing this refrain. First God sells his people into the hand of the enemy, then God sells the enemy back into the hand of Israel. Who determines power? Who determines conflict? Who determines when and where these battles are going to be fought? It is God.

So Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kadesh. Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kadesh. He went up with ten thousand men under his command and Deborah went up with him.

Once again, this is ten Alephs. I believe with all my heart that this is not a literal one thousand in each group. I think it is a large indeterminate group.

They didn't have calculators. They didn't have dog tags and spreadsheets and rosters. They didn't run around with paper checking off names.

They are battalion sized groups. So there are ten battalions basically that go. Deborah went up with him.

Now Heber the Kenite of the children of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses, had separated himself from the Kenites and pitched his tent near the terebinth tree at Zaanaim, which is beside Kadesh. So they reported to Sisera that Barak, the son of Abinoam, had gone up to Mount Tabor. So Sisera gathered together all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people who were with him from Haroshathagoyim to the river Kishon.

Now think about it. You've got ten battalion sized groups under Barak and you've got nine hundred chariots. Again, I am a little unsure of the literality of these numbers.

Whatever a hundred means is smaller than what a thousand means. But if there were actually nine hundred chariots and you've got ten groups, that would be ninety chariots against each battalion. This would be a lot of chariots for this day and for this time.

Hatzor, stabling, nine hundred horses, having nine hundred chariot drivers. Nine hundred is a lot of people. But the proportion is really what counts here.

So you can figure that there is a good contingent of chariots against each of the battalions that Barak is leading. All the people are with him. So Deborah says to Barak, up, for this is the day in which the Lord has delivered Sisera into your hand.

Has not the Lord gone out before you? So Barak went down from Mount Tabor. Notice she says, arise, and so he went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him, his ten battalions following him. To his credit, he leads.

It doesn't say, and behold he sent forth his ten battalions. He went down and they followed him. And the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot.

But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth Hagoyim and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword. Not a man was left. Now this is pretty important in the sense that if you think about superior numbers, superior armament, and by implication or by extension Yabin, supposedly this brilliant king, he's got the wisdom, he's the bright guy,

Harosheth Hagoyim, this capital that implies we're in charge of this post and all government property in view.

Any Goyim around here, we're in charge. And for them, of course, Goyim would include the Israelites. If you live in Hazor or you live in that city-state area, the Israelites are Goyim.

You're the chosen people and they're the outsiders. And so they say, we're the guys who will decide who is and who isn't. And there are many analogues to this in modern life.

We look around and figure other people have got the reins of our society, other people control the media, other agendas are at work in the educational system and in the entertainment system and in every different area of life. We're outgunned, we're outmanned, we're outsmarted in the sense that you can't get a hearing, you can't make a case without just being overwhelmed by the enemy control over the conduits of communication. You can hardly get a Christian voice heard anymore without all kinds of ridicule and abuse.

God decides when and where these battles will be fought. God decides when and where he is going to grant a victory. And God decides to whom he is going to grant that victory.

And if there is a failure in the Christian world today, it is not in the public realm of ideas. People keep saying, we should be more proactive, we should speak up, we should make our voice heard, we should have websites and pickets and rallies and publications and get on TV and challenge, fight these things publicly and make a big noise. There is no warrant anywhere in scripture for this kind of thing.

Where is the battle really and truly fought? Where did these generations fail? They did not instill spiritual truth in their successors. As long as the guy who knows the spiritual truth is alive, everybody is fine. As long as Ehud is alive, you have 80 years of peace.

As long as Othniel is alive, you have 40 years of peace. But the next generation knows not the Lord. And it is our personal faith and our personal obedience, individually and in our families and in our congregations, this is what enlivens and energizes and blesses a nation.

It is when we are doing what we are supposed to do as individual believers, in our own souls and in our own families and in our own congregations, that is the unlikely strategy. You would think, well, you have to fight fire with fire. You have to get into the media.

You have to get into the public arena. You have to get into politics. Look, the chariots represent that.

The wisdom and the numbers represent that. And God did not give Barak chariots. God did not say, oh, Barak, behold on the hillsides, these chariots are going to come down and fight fire with fire.

We will fight chariots with chariots. The Philistines were armed and dangerous when Shamgar

knocked them all silly with his ox goat. We do not have to use the tools of the world.

We do not have to use the methods of the world. We do not have to enter into the world's battlefield. We obey the commands of God.

And God does not command us to go into the public arena and advocate and lobby. God says, be ye holy. God says, love one another.

God says, operate in faith and obedience. Have faith. Have endurance.

Be consistent. Be persistent. Learn, grow in grace and knowledge of the Savior.

And it is by being faithful and being obedient in those areas that our inner demons and our societal demons will be conquered in no other way. All the political action, all of the legislative lobbying in the world isn't going to change the hearts and minds in the United States of America. It is the light shining in and through believers that will convert and will convince people to think differently.

And there is no other weapon. Barak went down and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword. Not a man was left.

Sisera himself had fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, for there was peace between Jabin king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. So Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me. Do not fear.

When he had turned aside with her into the tent, she covered him with a blanket. Then he said to her, please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty. So she opened a jug of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him.

He asked for water. She gave him milk. He said to her, stand at the door of the tent, and if any man comes and inquire of you and says, is there any man here, you shall say no.

Then Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him, and drove the peg into his temple, and it went down into the ground, for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died. Oddly enough.

Well, it's a great story, and we'll study the meaning of it next time, but just remember, the battle is not to the strong, the race is not to the swift, it is to the faithful. Let's close in prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for revealing these things to us in such a graphic and memorable way. We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will impress these truths on our hearts. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.