

The Book of Judges

Lesson 4: The Song of Deborah -- Judges 5:1-31

Picture the morning after. The dust of battle has settled on the plain of Esdraelon, the river Kishon has carried the wreckage of Sisera's army out toward the sea, and the iron chariots that terrorized Israel for twenty years lie tangled and useless in the mud. Israel is free. And what do Deborah and Barak do with their freedom? They do not throw a parade for themselves. They do not commission a monument to their own courage. They sing. They lift their voices and pour out a song, and from the very first line you can hear what is in their hearts: 'When the leaders take the lead in Israel, when the people willingly offer themselves, bless the LORD!' Before they tell you anything else, they tell you to bless the LORD. That is where right remembrance always begins.

Notice how the song travels. It sweeps back to Sinai, where the earth trembled and the mountains quaked before the God of Israel. It moves through the hard years when the highways were empty and travelers crept along the byways because the roads were not safe. It calls the roll of the tribes, and here the song turns honest and a little uncomfortable. Zebulun and Naphtali get named as the ones who jeopardized their lives to the death on the heights of the field. But Reuben? Reuben stayed home among the sheepfolds, listening to the pipings for the flocks, caught in 'great searchings of heart.' Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan. Dan lingered by his ships. Asher sat still at the coast. The song does not pretend everybody showed up, because everybody did not.

Then comes the line that ought to make every comfortable believer sit up straight. 'Curse Meroz, said 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.' Meroz is not condemned for fighting on the wrong side. Meroz is condemned for not coming. For sitting it out. For deciding that the LORD's battle was somebody else's problem. The song will not let us hide in the crowd. It asks each of us the plain question: when the LORD was at work, were you there, or were you back among the sheepfolds with your searchings of heart?

And all the while, underneath the praise and the roll call, one truth keeps rising to the surface: the LORD won this. 'They fought from the heavens; the stars from their courses fought against Sisera.' The torrent of Kishon swept the enemy away. Heaven and earth were enlisted on Israel's side because the LORD Himself went out to war for His people. The song ends not with a boast but with a prayer: 'So let all Your enemies perish, O LORD! But let those who love Him be like the sun when it comes out in full strength.' That is the heartbeat of this chapter, and it is meant to become the heartbeat of you. We were rescued. We did not rescue ourselves. So we sing.

Group Discussion: Deborah and Barak respond to God's victory not with self-congratulation but with a song that blesses the LORD and recounts what He did. Why do you think singing and

recounting God's mighty deeds is such an important response to deliverance, and what does our worship reveal about whether we have truly remembered who saved us?

Personal Reflection: The song honors the tribes who showed up and names the ones who stayed comfortably home, even cursing Meroz for not coming to the help of the LORD. In your own life right now, is there a place where the Lord's work is going on and you have been quietly staying among the sheepfolds, and what specifically is keeping you on the sidelines?

Read Judges 5:1–31

Study Questions

1. Judges 5 opens, 'Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day' (5:1), and the song immediately calls the people to 'bless the LORD' (5:2, 9). What does this passage teach us about the right and fitting response to God's deliverance, and why is praise, rather than self-congratulation, the proper way to mark a victory God has won?
2. The song begins by blessing the LORD before it recounts a single detail of the battle (5:2–3). When God answers a prayer or carries you through a hard season, what is usually your first instinct, and what would it look like for blessing the LORD to genuinely become your first response rather than an afterthought?
3. The song recounts God's mighty acts in history, from His coming forth at Sinai (5:4–5) to His fighting from the heavens (5:20). Why is remembering and recounting what God has done such a central part of biblical worship, and how does deliberate remembrance shape a people who might otherwise forget the God who saved them (compare Deuteronomy 8:11–18)?
4. The song looks back and names specific things the LORD did. When did you last sit down and deliberately recount God's faithfulness in your own story, naming concrete deliverances and answered prayers, and what happens in your heart when you stop remembering and start taking God's mercies for granted?

5. Of Zebulun and Naphtali the song says they 'jeopardized their lives to the point of death in the heights of the battlefield' (5:18), while Reuben stayed among the sheepfolds with 'great searchings of heart' (5:15-16) and Meroz was cursed for not coming 'to the help of the LORD' (5:23). What does this contrast teach about the difference between merely feeling something about God's work and actually showing up for it?
6. Meroz was not cursed for opposing God but for failing to come and help when the LORD was at work (5:23). Where in the life of the Lord's church, or in serving people around you, have you been more like Meroz, present in name but absent in action, and what is one specific way you can come to the help of the work this week?
7. Again and again the song gives the glory to God, not to the warriors: the stars fought, the torrent of Kishon swept the enemy away, the LORD Himself came down (5:4-5, 20-21). Why is it so important that Israel saw the LORD, and not Barak's army, as the true Warrior, and what does this teach us about God as the one who fights for His people (compare Exodus 14:14; 1 Samuel 17:47)?
8. It is easy to take credit for what God has done through us, especially when we worked hard and risked much. Where are you tempted to quietly take for yourself the glory that belongs to the Lord, and how can you cultivate a heart that, like this song, hands the credit back to God where it belongs?
9. The whole song is worship: it remembers God's deeds, blesses His name, honors those who served Him, and ends in prayer, 'So let all Your enemies perish, O LORD! But let those who love Him be like the sun' (5:31). Drawing the threads together, what does this chapter teach about what right praise actually is, how worship that recounts God's mighty acts forms a people over time, and how does this song of a delivered people point us forward to the

greater deliverance accomplished in Christ, for whom the redeemed will sing a new song (Luke 1:68–75; Revelation 5:9–10; 15:3)?

10. Having sat under this song of praise, name one specific way the Lord Jesus is teaching you, through Judges 5, both to praise Him more truly and to volunteer for His work more readily. What concrete step will you take this week so that you are found among those who willingly offer themselves and who love Him 'like the sun when it comes out in full strength' (5:31)?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Exodus 15:1–21, the song of Moses and Miriam after the Red Sea, the pattern of praise that follows God's deliverance; Deuteronomy 8:11–18, the warning to remember the LORD and not forget the God who delivered you; Psalm 103:1–5, 'Bless the LORD, O my soul,' and forget not all His benefits; 1 Samuel 17:45–47, the battle is the LORD's and He saves not with sword and spear; Revelation 15:3, the redeemed sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb

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