

## Thoughts From Other Minds:

Israel could hardly have been in a weaker position. ... But "Israel cried out to the LORD" (4:3) and God answered by revelation through the prophetess, which stirred the hearts and resolves of some of His people and which provided the strategy for victory. Yet even that victory was not won by their blows but by heavenly intervention. Israel began in weakness and ended in weakness. What we have to grasp is that this is not an unfortunate oversight or accident, but the very heart and kernel of God's plans. In Pauline terms again, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Cor. 4:7). To use frail, weak, easily smashed clay pots to carry the light of the gospel into the world is an essential ingredient of the divine strategy. That way, as here in Judges, everybody knows that the power is superhuman. .... We are disposable, but the power of God will go on being demonstrated through our human weakness.

Sometimes we find that hard to accept, especially in our world that is devoted to power and success, impressiveness and influence. It runs counter to all that our materialistic culture holds dear. That is why it is so much needed – to challenge the culture's presuppositions and expose its false values .... The problem is that we Christians are all too often conformers rather than transformers. We let the world squeeze us into its mould rather than allowing the Spirit of God to renew our minds daily through the truth of His Word (Rom. 12:2). So we tend to be very impressed by the outward trappings of success, by size and wealth and breadth of influence, in our churches and organizations. What we have to stop and ask ourselves is how much of all that is that is really biblical. And the honest answer is, "not much."

There is a hidden but inescapable logic behind this. How can the messengers of the gospel expect to be outwardly impressive, widely acclaimed and financially successful when the message they are commissioned to preach and live concerns a suffering Servant-King, who was and is despised and rejected by men, who died a criminal's death and was buried in a borrowed tomb? The very message of the gospel stands in direct contradiction of many of its modern messengers. No wonder the world thinks the church lacks credibility.

Now this does not mean that we do not use all the resources available to us via material means to get the gospel out. Nor does it mean that we settle for a mediocre level of presentation or a self-consciously ascetic lifestyle. ... But it does mean that we do not rely on these human resources. Rather, we recognize that power belongs to God alone, that his is the battle and his is the glory; so we put no confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3). In practice, this means that we can with Paul "boast in [our] infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon [us]" 2 Cor. 12:9b). His strength is made perfect in weakness, provided that weakness is put into God's hands. We are made to feel and know our weakness in order to drive us to a fresh dependence on Christ.

David Jackman, *The Preacher's Commentary, Judges/Ruth*, pp. 88-89.

## Camperdown Noorat Terang Presbyterian Charge

8 May 2016

**Sermon:** "Saved by faith to love and glory" (text: Judges chapters 4 & 5)

**Scripture:** Judges 4:1-24, 5:1-31

### Sermon Notes

**Introduction:** Our studies in Judges brings us to the third cycle of sin, judgment and salvation, typical of the central part of the book, and to Deborah, who judged Israel, and to Barak and Jael, not judges, but saviours all the same. After Ehud died, Israel again did evil—and so the Lord sold them into oppression by Jabin and Sisera.

We might not be greatly impressed with iron chariots—but they were the high-tech war machines of that age. The lightly armed Israelites would have been helpless against them, mown down like grass before the reaper; and so in helpless misery the people of Israel cried out to the Lord for help (v. 3).

### 1. Helped by the Lord

Amazingly, the Lord did help them, not by raising up a judge like Othniel or Ehud or Shamgar, but by commissioning Barak to lead the people to victory of Sisera's 900 iron chariots. God loves diversity; his works are never dull or boring; he did it differently to reveal more clearly that he is the Saviour; salvation is of the Lord.

Deborah is an oddity in the scriptures; a woman in leadership; she was no Queen Boadicea, but a prophetess who judged Israel (v. 4). We think of prophets as predictors—and they were; but firstly they were spokespersons for God, just as Aaron was Moses' 'prophet' (Ex 7:1).

Deborah was appointed by the Lord to speak for him, and he spoke to Barak through her (vs. 6-7). God could have demonstrated that he is Saviour without calling Barak to action through Deborah—but by calling Barak in this way he was also showing that his salvation is by faith.

Barak is included among the heroes of faith (Heb 11:32-34); many people think of faith as something irrational, as a leap beyond reason, as believing what we know could not be true; but real faith is believing God's word; being persuaded that God can be relied upon and trusting him.

Barak's faith may not have been without its weaknesses (cf. v. 9, NIV) but what really mattered was that he had faith, and he went as God commanded (v. 10) - and then, when Deborah said, 'Go', he went! Barak with his 10,000 men following charged down Mt Tabor at Sisera's chariots—and the Lord routed them (v. 15).

But why weren't they mown down like hay? Because the Lord fought for them—he sent rain, and the Kishon, usually dry, became a raging torrent that swept the chariots away. So Sisera fled on foot, and Barak pursued his army, so that the whole army was killed; not a man was left (vs. 15-16).

While Barak lived under the Old Covenant, we are under the New Covenant; we are not a nation, and our enemies are not people, but spirits (Eph 6:12). Also, our weapons are not earthly; our armour is gospel armour, and our sword is God's word, and our power is God's power unleashed by prayer.

However, this spiritual conflict becomes tangible as people oppose the gospel, in insults and mockery and persecution and suffering because we are Christians—but even so we do not overcome by force but by faith, by trusting God and doing what is right (1 Pet 3:9, 14-18).

## 2. Helping the Lord

While our warfare New Covenant warfare, the principles are the same; it is the Lord who saves. But he works with and through people of faith, like Barak, who charged Sisera's army, trusting the Lord for victory.

So Deborah rejoices that the leaders took the lead, that the people offered themselves willingly (v. 3). She sings to the Lord—but her heart goes out to the commanders who offered themselves willingly. And she sings of 'the righteous triumphs of the Lord, the righteous triumphs of his villagers in Israel (v. 11).

The Lord shares his glory with those who risked themselves in his cause—but some missed out on the glory because they would not risk themselves in the conflict; the clans of Reuben thought about it, but self-interest prevailed and then did nothing; Gilead was safe, and Dan and Asher also adopted an 'I'm all right Jack' attitude.

They missed the honour accorded Zebulun and Naphtali—but Meroz brought on itself God's curse - they did not come to the help of the Lord (v. 23), while the blessing was Jael's (vs. 24-27).

Many accuse of grave wrongdoing—and yet the Holy Spirit, through Deborah, says she did well! Unlike Meroz, she came to the help of the Lord; she put herself on his side; she could not use a sword, but pitching tents was women's work; skilled with hammer and pegs, she did what she could for the Lord.

It was not murder, but the execution of the Lord's death sentence upon one who deserved to die (cf. the rape and pillage described (v. 30)). Far from being embarrassed by Jael's deed, Deborah sings 'So may all your enemies perish, O LORD! But may those who love you be like the sun as he rises in his might (v. 31).

We are not to imitate Jael by taking judgment into our own hands, but by giving ourselves to the Lord in his service as she did; she put aside even her loyalty to her husband for him, and he honoured her. We are shocked because we do not love the Lord as we ought; if we did, we would be glad this evil man got justice (Ps 97:10).

God 'so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life' – but 'whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity.' (Prov 28:4) Saving faith works by love in those who have it to produce hatred of evil and love for the Lord and valiant deeds in his service, and glory.

## *My Notes:*

### *Questions for Reflection:*

1. In what ways is the 'sin, judgment and salvation' cycle of Judges 4 and 5 similar and different from the same cycles in the previous chapter?
2. Why is not valid to say that because Deborah was a woman in a position of leadership and a prophet, women may be teachers and preachers in the church? (cf. 1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:8-15, 3:2-7; Tit 1:5-9)
3. How is the way the Lord commanded Barak through Deborah connected to his inclusion in the honour roll of faith? (Heb 11:32-34) How does it help us distinguish true faith from false faith?
4. What possible interpretations may be placed upon Barak's 'if'? (v. 8—cf also Ex 33:12-16) What really matters about Barak's response, and how does this encourage us in regard to our own oft faulty faith?
5. How does Deborah's song in chapter 5 relate to the prose account of chapter 4? What does it add to our knowledge of the events recorded in chapter 4, and how does it affect our judgment of those events?
6. Why is it true to say that we affirm v. 31 each time we pray the Lord's Prayer?