

A STUDY OF JUDGES & RUTH

SECURITY BLANKET

Serena Williams never changed her socks during a tournament. Michael Jordan wore his championship NC shorts under his Bulls uniform for every game. Les Miles eats grass from the field before every game and in high pressure situations. Athletic superstitions range from odd to gross, to some that sound pretty good—like Brian Urlacher’s two cookies before every game.

Superstitions act like a warm security blanket to fend off fear, help players relax, and get their head right. In today’s passage, we witness God’s judge raising up a hero to go out and fight for the Lord. The hero had the assurance of victory from the Lord—but like a child fearing the dark, parental assurance does little to ease the tension until we have blankie. In the case of our story, our hero, Barak, refused to fight unless his security blanket, Deborah, was there with him. Because he didn’t trust the Lord’s promise, he had the victory, but the glory went to another.

JUDGES 4 (SELECTED)

⁴Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. ⁵She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment. ⁶She sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali and said to him, “Has not the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you, ‘Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun. ⁷And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin’s army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand?’” ⁸Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go.” ⁹And she said, “I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.”

¹⁷ But Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael... ¹⁸ And Jael came out to meet Sisera and said to him, “Turn aside, my lord; turn aside to me; do not be afraid.” So he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug... ²¹ But Jael the wife of Heber took a tent peg, and took a hammer in her hand. Then she went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple until it went down into the ground while he was lying fast asleep from weariness. So he died.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

In the flow of *Judges*, Deborah, a *woman*, is considered a "step down" from a left-handed *man*. Jael killed Sisera in a surprising twist to the story. The cultural second-class-ness of these women might lead us to ask, "Is the Bible sexist?"

In a world confused regarding gender and sexuality, does the Bible's take seem too old-fashioned? The answer is, "kind of." The Bible doesn't condemn the cultural ideas, but it does often defy them—making women heroes.



DISCUSSION

What good-luck charms have you depended on?

ICEBREAKER

1. What did God command of Barak and what was the promise? (6-7)

OBSERVATION

2. How did Barak respond to God’s command? (8)

3. How was Debora's reply in verse 9 fulfilled? (17-21)

4. How is the Lord’s control of events emphasized in the commands and events?

INTERPRETATION

5. Have you ever asked God to do something, promising him something if he came through? In what ways has this study shown you that's not a good idea?

APPLICATION

Is there something in your life that just seems impossible for God to overcome? Don't wait to talk to someone. If you have questions or need help, talk to your Coach today!

STUDY NOTES

BACK WHERE WE STARTED

Comedian Jerry Seinfeld has a bit on horse racing from the perspective of the horse. He wondered aloud if the horse really understands that they're racing. Sure, he understands that the jockey is trying to get somewhere in a hurry, hitting him with that little stick. But Seinfeld breathlessly imitates the horse realizing that they've gone in a big circle, *"We were just here, what was the point of that? This is where we were. Why didn't we just stay here, we would have been first!"*

Hopefully, you've been reading *Judges* as we've gone through this study—especially reading the parts we cannot cover. If so, you're beginning to feel the repetition of the cycle of *Judges*. In chapter 3, the people rebelled and God sent Cushan-rishathaim of Mesopotamia. Othniel delivered them. The people rebelled again and God sent Eglon king of Moab. Ehud buried a whole 18-inch sword in him. Chapter 4 opens, *"And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord."* This time, God used Jabin, king of Canaan, and the commander of his army, Sisera, to punish Israel. And, we're right back where we started.

GODLY LEADERS MUST OVERCOME FEAR

Although it's not very politically correct, God had raised up a judge that was culturally considered a "step down" from a left-handed *man*. ***Deborah, a prophetess was judging Israel at that time. She would sit under the conveniently named palm of Deborah tree and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment. One day she sent and summoned Barak... and said to him, "Has not the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you, 'Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun. And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand'?"***

Fearful Barak needed his security blanket, ***"If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go."*** On the one hand, this could be a noble request—God's chosen man asked God's judge to come share in the spoils of conquest. He knew where his power came from and wanted a "direct line" to God. The problem lies in the conditional nature of his request (i.e. *"If you go with me..."*). More likely, he was afraid, and rightfully so. The Lord commanded him to go against a superior army with chariots. He brought Deborah as a lucky charm to win the day.

Deborah agreed to go, ***"I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman."*** Again, not very "PC," but it was unthinkable that a woman might steal the glory from a man in this way.

Barak and the soldiers courageously went out to fight. *The Lord routed Sisera* (4:15). In fact, the Lord sent a torrent of rain flooding the Kishon river and stopping Sisera's chariots in the mud (5:21). ***Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael. Jael came out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Turn aside, my lord; turn aside to me; do not be afraid." So he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug.*** Sisera's king, Hazor had good relations with Jael's husband, Heber. Sisera felt safe. Wearing from his journey he asked for and was given a drink and went to sleep.

Then, what happened stands as one of the most shocking turn of events in all of Scripture. ***Jael the wife of Heber took a tent peg, and took a hammer in her hand. Then she went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple until it went down into the ground while he was lying fast asleep from weariness. So he died.***

FEAR CAN BE OVERCOME BY BOLD OBEDIENCE

In *Judges* 4, God's judge was a woman. God's hero was afraid. And, God's champion was a housewife. This is an underdog story of the ages. They took on a superior force and eventually drove them back until Sisera and Jabin were dead and Israel was free from oppression

Again, we see that God can use *anybody*. Also, we see flawed men and women accomplishing great things. God doesn't need flawless people, he uses people surrendered to him. We don't overcome our fear sitting on the sideline. We overcome fear through bold obedience to what God has called us to do. The person whom God calls, he equips. Often, the equipping comes through obedience to the calling.

Are you ready to share the gospel with a teammate? Are you equipped to reach your school for Christ? Can you stand against the weight of standing alone for your faith? In your own strength, of course not! Barak couldn't see a way to win against a superior force, but to his credit, he went out trusting God and his judge. Despite his flaws, Barak is in the "Hall of Faith" in Hebrews 11:32. Why? Because when we can't, God still can!