

Main Idea: In Judges 4-5 we learn what the Lord can do with a mother who fears Him above all else.

I. Deborah’s story: We see what the Lord can do (ch 4).

A. The story is full of surprises.

1. Israel turned from the Lord (1-3).
2. A woman named Deborah turned Israel back to the Lord (4-7).
3. A man named Barak asked a woman to go into battle with him (8).
4. The woman agreed but announced another woman would get the honor (9-10).
5. A friend of Israel became a friend of Israel’s enemy (11-13).
6. An army with swords defeated an army with chariots (14-16).
7. The wife of the traitor killed the commander of the enemy (17-23).

B. The story is part of the bigger story of redemption.

1. It teaches us about our problem as sinners.
2. It teaches us about our need for deliverance.
3. It teaches us that God is willing to rescue sinners that cry out to Him.

II. Deborah’s song: We see what the Lord deserves (ch 5).

A. Deborah sang about what the Lord did in the battle (2-12).

B. Deborah sang about what people did (and didn’t do) in the battle (13-23).

C. Deborah sang about what happened to two women at the end of the battle (24-30).

1. Like Jael, the blessed woman is the one who is willing to fight for the honor of God, no matter what the cost.
2. Like Sisera’s mother, the foolish woman thinks her family exists for her.

D. Deborah sang about what she wanted as a result of the battle (31).

Implications: What do we learn from Deborah and Jael?

1. We need women who treasure the pleasure of God above all else.
2. We need women who are willing to fight for the honor of their God.
3. We need to give honor to such women.

Recognition of Mothers (at beginning of service)

Today for Mother’s Day, I’d like to hit the pause button on our Gospel Disconnect series and direct our attention in God’s Word to a story about a mother. She exemplifies these familiar words, taken from today’s Scripture reading.

Scripture Reading: Proverbs 31:30-31 “Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. ³¹ Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.”

Have you ever heard of a man by the name of Lappidoth? I doubt it. But you’ve probably heard of his wife, and she’s the woman of the hour on this Mother’s Day message. Her name is Deborah.

I have a lot of respect for mothers. A mother can exert powerful influence on the people around her, on her husband and children for sure, on her grandchildren if she has them. And as important as that is, sometimes the influence of a mother goes way beyond the boundaries of her own family. Sometimes her influence goes national.

There’s an interesting phrase in Judges 5:7. Deborah calls herself “a mother in Israel.”² In the fuller context she said, “Village life in Israel ceased, ceased until I, Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel.”

That’s significant. There’s no mention in the Bible that Deborah had biological children. She may have, but it doesn’t say. What she herself said is that she arose, that

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the message preached at WBC on 5/9/10.

² The only other place we see this phrase is in 2 Samuel 20:19 where a wise woman told Joab, “We are the peaceful and faithful in Israel. You are trying to destroy a city that is a mother in Israel.”

is, she stepped into the national spotlight in the providence of God and became a mother to her nation, Israel.

When did it happen? When *village life ceased*, she said (NIV). It ceased because it was too dangerous to walk the streets, and it was too dangerous because foreign and wicked enemy forces controlled those village streets in her country thirteen centuries BC. It was then that Deborah stepped forward to be a mother in Israel.

What exactly did she mean by calling herself “a mother in Israel”? I think commentator C. J. Goslinga says it well, “This pregnant phrase means that she became a mother in regard to all the Israelites, a woman who gave her all to save her people, who took their needs to heart and identified with them, and who by her motherly devotion and vigorous leadership aroused her compatriots and infused them with a new spirit.”³

I’d say that in light of what’s happening in our country these days, we could use some mothers like that. Wouldn’t you agree?

Some of us remember the days when you didn’t need to lock your doors at night. Those days are long gone. I read that Scioto County has an overall crime rate of 2,521 per 100,000 residents, which is about average in the United States. This means that your chances of becoming a victim of a crime in our county is 1 in 40 this year.⁴

I think most of us would agree that we’re seeing village life ceasing all around us. And this means it’s the perfect time for some women (and men too) to step forward and be a mother (or father) in our country.

And of course, the crime problem is just symptomatic of a more basic problem. It’s the same problem that Deborah faced and addressed in her day, the problem of living in a country where people turn from God and His Word and do things their own way.

Let me be clear at the outset. It’s not so much what Deborah did, but what the Lord did through her that made the difference in her country, as Deborah herself affirmed. It’s the Lord that changes hearts and lives and families and countries, not people. But the Lord often works through people to bring about the needed changes.

What kind of people does He use? Here’s the answer. We see it in Proverbs 31, and we see it exemplified by Deborah. It’s what’s needed today. The Lord loves to work through people who *fear Him*.

That’s what’s needed, women, men, people who fear Him and give evidence of this fear by giving Him the honor for what He accomplishes through them.

Lest you’re thinking, “Well then, He can’t use me because I’m too weak,” be encouraged. Later in this service, we’ll remind ourselves by coming to the Lord’s table, that what the Lord requires, He makes possible through the atoning work of His Son.

So let’s behold God at work through Deborah in Judges 4-5. Let’s behold what the Lord can do with a woman who fears Him. We see it first in Deborah’s story (that’s Judges 4), and then in Deborah’s song (that’s Judges 5). In her story we’ll see what the Lord can do. In her song we’ll hear what the Lord deserves.

I. Deborah’s story: We see what the Lord can do (ch 4).

We find Deborah’s story in what is called the book of Judges. It’s called “Judges” because it tells how God raised up leaders (“judges”) in Israel between the time the Jews entered the promised land and when David became king. Quite frankly, it was not a good time. Judges 2:10 indicates there arose a generation in Israel that “did not know the Lord,

³ C. J. Goslinga, p. 302.

⁴ Reference: www.insideprison.com/city_crime_statistics.asp?cityCaseR=SCIOTO&stateNorm=OH&zipC=45662

nor the works He had done for Israel.” And it went down hill from there, as the final verse indicates, until “everyone did as he saw fit” (21:25).

Sounds familiar, doesn’t it? It starts with a generation that doesn’t know the Lord. It ends up with everyone doing their own thing. That’s how a country implodes.

Thankfully, in Israel’s case, God saved this country, again and again, through the judges.

Let me make two important observations about Deborah’s story. First...

A. The story is full of surprises. I’ll point out eight of the surprises as we walk through chapter four.

1. Israel turned from the Lord (1-3). Notice verse 1 (NIV), “After Ehud died, the Israelites once again did evil in the eyes of the LORD.”

You say, “Israel turned from the Lord. That’s a surprise?” In one sense, no. It’s what Israel did time and time again. The Lord blessed Israel with the promised land, but Israel, because its people wanted to be like the pagan nations around them, abandoned the Lord and went after the Baal gods. And so, like the world around them, they did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and consequently brought God’s judgment upon them.

So Israel turned from the Lord. No, there’s no surprise in that. And yet, it ought to surprise us. They turned *from the Lord*? Are you kidding me? Why would anybody in their right mind want to turn from the magnificent Creator who gave them life and live without Him? It doesn’t make sense, and for a ton of reasons, namely, when you turn from the Lord life gets real hard real fast.

Verses 2-3 (NIV) says, “So the LORD sold them into the hands of Jabin, a king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth Haggoyim. Because he had nine hundred iron chariots and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the LORD for help.”

Here we see the truth about sin, my friend. As Dale Ralph Davis explains, “Sin is a boring routine, not a fresh excitement. The fast lane becomes an old rut.” And it does so, says Davis, because of “the slavery and the staleness of sin.”⁵

So Israel turned from the Lord. When you consider how wonderful the Lord is and how hard life gets when you turn from Him, that is a surprise that is far too common.

2. A woman named Deborah turned Israel back to the Lord (4-7). Let me introduce the main characters of the story, and a little geography so we can navigate intelligently. In verse 2 there’s a Canaanite king named **Jabin** in Hazor (ten miles northwest of the Sea of Galilee). There’s **Sisera**, the commander of Jabin’s army who lives in Harosheth Haggoyim (apparently a town west of the Galilee region). In verse 6 we’ll meet **Barak** from Kadesh in Naphtali (another town also in the Galilee region). There’s a battle that takes place at Mount Tabor (that’s ten miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee). Near Mount Tabor is the Kishon River and the Valley of Jezreel—that’s where General Sisera set up camp with his force of chariots and troops.

And then there’s **Deborah**. Her Hebrew name means “honey-bee.” She, of course, is a woman, and she led Israel as a judge from 1261 to 1241 B.C. Now that’s a surprise. It’s a man’s world in the 13th century BC, but Deborah is leading the people of God.

Verse 5 indicates, “She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided.”

⁵ Dale Ralph Davis, p. 72.

How did she become Israel's judge in the first place? I'm not sure, but I get the sense it had to do with a gift God gave her. Verse 4 says she was a prophetess, which means that God spoke to her and through her to His people.

Like He did in verses 6-7. "She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, 'The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead the way to Mount Tabor. I will lure Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.'"

Israel turned from the Lord—surprise #1. Then Deborah, a woman no less, steps forward to turn Israel back to the Lord—surprise #2. She gives a message to a man that he needs to mobilize 10,000 troops and get ready to watch the Lord work. At that point we see our third surprise.

3. *A man named Barak asked a woman to go into battle with him (8).* In verse 8 Barak said to Deborah, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go." That's an interesting stipulation. Not very macho. In fact, kind of passive, wouldn't you say? But of course, it's going to take more than macho to win this battle, as Barak knows.

4. *The woman agreed but announced another woman would get the honor (9-10).* Notice verse 9, "'Very well,' Deborah said, 'I will go with you. But because of the way you are going about this, the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will hand Sisera over to a woman.' So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh."

To reiterate, Deborah is not the hero in this story. The fact that Deborah went isn't the reason Israel won this battle. The writer keeps showing us human reason after human reason why Israel should not have won this battle. Israel had turned from the Lord. Israel was being led by a woman. The general who's leading the troops won't go unless a lady accompanies him to the battle scene. How can you expect a guy like that to mobilize troops, let alone lead them to victory?

But lo and behold, the troops came, an evidence that God is at work. And He is the real hero in this story.

I love Deborah's comment, "Ah right, Barak, I'll go. But when the battle ends, you're not going to get the honor. The Lord is going to hand Sisera over to a woman.

Then a fifth surprise...

5. *A friend of Israel became a friend of Israel's enemy (11-13).* Notice verse 11, "Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law, and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaanannim near Kedesh.

Huh? We're told that Heber the Kenite left the other Kenites. Who's Heber, and who are the Kenites, and what does this have to do with our story?

The Kenites were the descendants of Moses' brother-in-law and lived down south in Judah. They were friends of Israel. The Kenites were also metalworkers (that's what the word means). But one Kenite, a fellow named Heber, decided to move north to Zaanannim near Kedesh. Why'd he do that? The text doesn't say, apparently for business reasons (the guy works with metal and there's a big army up north with chariots and spears). Apparently, he doesn't care if the enemy signs his paycheck, as long as it's bigger than the check he was getting from his own people.

But why do we need to know this piece of information about Heber? It doesn't seem to fit in a story about a military campaign. But oh, it will in a moment when we meet Heber's wife. But first, another surprise...

6. *An army with swords defeated an army with chariots (14-16).* Here's how it happened. In verses 12-13 both sides moved into place. Barak had swords. Sisera had 900 iron chariots. From a human standpoint, it's no contest. The army with the superior firepower is going to win, right?

Surprise! Take a look at verses 14-16 (NIV), "Then Deborah said to Barak, 'Go! This is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the LORD gone ahead of you?' So Barak went down Mount Tabor, followed by ten thousand men. At Barak's advance, the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera abandoned his chariot and fled on foot. But Barak pursued the chariots and army as far as Harosheth Haggoyim. All the troops of Sisera fell by the sword; not a man was left."

Talk about an upset! The guys with the sticks beat the guys with the tanks. How in the world did that happen? The text is quite clear. Verse 15 (ESV), "And *the LORD routed Sisera.*" Who won this battle? Yahweh did. Not Barak. Not even Deborah. The Lord did it.

But how He did it is fascinating. Remember the geography? Where did the Lord tell Barak to go with his 10,000 soldiers? Up on Mount Tabor, right? That makes sense, since chariots can't attack up a mountain. And where did Sisera set up camp? The text tells us that when Sisera discovered that Barak was on that mountain with his troops (and he heard that, according to verse 12), Sisera organized his massive army of 900 iron chariots plus soldiers down in the valley by the Kishon River at the base of the mountain. From a military standpoint, Sisera had Barak exactly where he wanted him, trapped on a mountain with nowhere to go. All Sisera had to do was wait it out.

But then came the shocker. Deborah told Barak, "The Lord says to go on the offensive. Leave the safety of the mountain and attack Sisera! Don't mind his chariots. I'll take care of that insignificant problem."

And that's what happened. The guys with the sticks went after the guys with the tanks. And they won!

You say, "What happened to those chariots?" Apparently, the Lord neutralized them. The text of verse 17 says specifically that Sisera left his chariot and fled on foot. Why would he do that? That's like saying a soldier left his tank when he saw infantry approaching. There's no way a man on foot can defeat a man in a chariot, all things being equal. But they weren't equal.

The text says, "The Lord *routed* Sisera and all his chariots and army." The Hebrew verb for "routed" is *hamam* (KJV 'discomfited'). It means "to make a noise, move noisily, confuse." In other places in the Bible, this same word describes situations in which God brings a thunderstorm (as in Joshua 10:10-11; 1 Sam. 7:10; Ps 18:14; 144:6).⁶

And that's apparently what happened here. Being in chariot on a flat plain next to a river is great, *unless* the river floods. Then what happens to your chariot? It becomes a "lead sled." And as we'll see in Deborah's song in chapter 5 (verses 4 & 20), that's seems to be what happened. The Lord sent what is often referred to as a "natural disaster," perhaps a fierce rainstorm, and the Kishon River swelled and crashed over its banks, and the plain flooded, and the enemy's chariots were buried in the mud. Suddenly, Sisera's superior military power was gone.

Sisera lost his entire army that day. Verse 16 says not a man was left. Sisera himself ran for his life, and that brings us to the seventh and final surprise.

⁶ Observation by Dale Ralph Davis, p. 75.

7. *The wife of the traitor killed the commander of the enemy (17-23).* Notice verse 17, “Sisera, however, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there were friendly relations between Jabin king of Hazor and the clan of Heber the Kenite.”

Remember Heber? He’s the guy we met back in verse 11. Now we’re told that Heber’s clan and Jabin king of Hazor were on friendly terms. That’s interesting. A one time friend of Israel befriended the enemy of Israel. It’s amazing what a person will do for money. And yet even a greedy man’s decision to move where the money is falls under the sovereign control of Almighty God, for the Lord actually used that move to put things in place to bring down Sisera. And He used Sisera’s friend’s wife to do it.

The writer gives us the details in verses 18-24, “Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, ‘Come, my lord, come right in. Don’t be afraid.’ So he entered her tent, and she put a covering over him. ‘I’m thirsty,’ he said. ‘Please give me some water.’ She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up. ‘Stand in the doorway of the tent,’ he told her. ‘If someone comes by and asks you, ‘Is anyone here?’ say ‘No.’” But Jael, Heber’s wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died.⁷ Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. Come,’ she said, ‘I will show you the man you’re looking for.’ So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera with the tent peg through his temple—dead. On that day God subdued Jabin, the Canaanite king, before the Israelites. And the hand of the Israelites grew stronger and stronger against Jabin, the Canaanite king, until they destroyed him.”

Just look at Jael. I wonder what her husband told her when he saw his friend (and money source) with a spike through his head? Jael had to face that fear, and the fear of what happens if I miss with the mallet, or if he wakes up. And how did she overcome those fears? Here’s how, and it’s the same way we’ll overcome our own fears.

She feared something else more. No, not something, but *someone*. Friends, what we are seeing in Judges 4 is what the Lord can do through a person who fears Him above all else. A woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.

You say, “Wait a minute. I get the fearing God part of this story, but what about the R-rated details? Sure, the outcome is great. Jael got rid of Israel’s enemy. But she used deception and even brutality to accomplish it. It just doesn’t seem right.”

That brings to mind the story Dale Davis tells about a former president of our country. “When Teddy Roosevelt was a student at Harvard, he taught a Sunday School class. One day a boy came to class with a black eye, admitting he had been in a fight. On Sunday no less. A bigger boy had been pinching his sister, the lad said, and he got into a fist fight with him. Teddy said, ‘You did perfectly right,’ and gave him a dollar. The vestrymen thought this was going too far and released TR from his Sunday School duties.”⁸

Then Davis comments, “That episode is symptomatic: there is almost an unwritten cultural law that religion and theology—and God—should always be gentle, soft, and nice. Strange then that the God of the Bible is a warrior.”⁹

He sure is in Judges 4. And He used a couple of warrior women to get the job done.

⁷ I read that even today among the Bedouins pitching the tent is women’s work. So she knows how to handle a mallet and spike.

⁸ Dale Ralph Davis, p. 74.

⁹ Dale Ralph Davis, p. 74.

Keep in mind this is historical narrative, not a New Testament epistle. The author of Judges is telling us what Jael did, not giving us a prescription for how to get rid of abusive people.

The truth is, this man Sisera was a wicked thug. Verse 3 says he had “cruelly oppressed” the Israelites for twenty years. And even his mother, who we’ll meet in chapter five, talked about how her son and his men enjoyed raping the girls they captured in battle (5:30).

But let’s not miss the forest for the trees in this story. Let’s not get so hung up with the ethical dilemma regarding Jael’s actions that we miss the obvious. This story is part of a bigger story.

B. The story is part of the bigger story of redemption. As such it teaches us about three vital realities.

1. *It teaches us about our problem as sinners.*
2. *It teaches us about our need for deliverance.*
3. *It teaches us that God is willing to rescue sinners that cry out to Him.*

This is why thirteen centuries after God raised up Deborah to rescue His people, He added another chapter to His redemption story, the climax, when He sent His Son into this world. What kind of world? A world filled with vile Siseras and compromising Hebers. And what did His Son do? He died on a cross in the place of sinners like Sisera, and sinners like Deborah and Jael too, who even on their best days still miss the mark. And there on that cross, the Son of God endured the wrath of God in the place of sinners, so that if they will repent and call out to Him, and believe in Him, He will rescue them, forgive them, transform them, and give them eternal life.

This is what the story of Judges 4 is all about, my friend. Sinners need deliverance. And what sinners need, God provides for those who call out to Him. He did it through Deborah for Israel. He does it now through His Son, Jesus Christ, for the world.

Have you called out to God, repented, and put your total trust in His Son?

I love what Deborah did next. It seems so out of place. She sang a *song*, a duet in fact. According to 5:1, “On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song.”

We’ve learned what the Lord can do from Deborah’s story in chapter 4.

II. Deborah’s song: We see what the Lord deserves (ch 5).

Not only did she sing it, but apparently she wrote it too. She identifies herself by name in verse 7, and there are feminine Hebrew verbs throughout. It’s quite a song, and it makes a vital point perfectly clear.

When the Lord does something, the Lord deserves the credit. When He rescues sinners, He deserves the credit. When He chooses to use us in the process, He deserves the credit. And that’s what Deborah gave Him in this song.

We don’t have time to look at the particulars of this song, but I want you to see the flow of the whole. There are four movements to Deborah’s song.

A. Deborah sang about what the Lord did in the battle (2-12). The duet begins in verse 2 (NIV), “When the princes in Israel take the lead, when the people willingly offer themselves—praise the LORD!” That’s for sure. When leaders do what they’re supposed to do, which is lead, and when the rest of the people do what they’re supposed to do, which is willingly offer themselves for the work their leaders call them to do, the fitting response is surely, “Praise the Lord!” Or, “Bless the Lord!”, as the ESV says.

That’s what just happened, sings Deborah. Barak led the way, and the troops followed his lead, and the Lord deserves the credit for it all!

Deborah continues her praise in verse 3, “Hear this, you kings! Listen, you rulers! I will sing to the LORD, I will sing; I will make music to the LORD, the God of Israel.”

Did you ever wonder why we sing so much in church, and why we encourage you to participate meaningfully? Here’s why. Look at Deborah. Singing is a vital response to God’s deliverance.

It’s like going to a ballgame, witnessing the winning shot at the buzzer, and responding with total silence. Impossible, unless you’re dead, or don’t care. This is why we sing. We can’t keep silent, not when we consider the amazing victory He has won for us. It gives us great joy, and Him great glory, to open our mouths and sing the story again and again about the One who rescued us, and how He did it.

In the rest of the first movement, which you can read on your own later, Deborah tells exactly what the Lord did in the battle. For a sampling, notice verse 4, “O LORD, when you went out from Seir...the earth shook, the heavens poured, the clouds poured down water.”

It’s interesting that when we listen to Deborah in this section, it’s hard to tell if she’s talking about God’s deliverance in Moses’ day, or her own. Does she have in mind what the Lord did at Mount Sinai, or Mount Tabor? She seems to refer to both, for as Davis explains, “The God who decisively came to Israel at Sinai comes again and again to the aid of his people in their present troubles.”¹⁰ Indeed, He does, for us as well.

In the first movement, Deborah sang about what the Lord did in the battle. Next...

B. Deborah sang about what people did (and didn’t do) in the battle (13-23).

Some people got involved, praise the Lord! But others found excuses and stayed home, shame on them. Deborah sings about the participants who followed Barak into battle, men from the tribes of Ephraim and Benjamin, Manasseh and Zebulun, Issachar and Naphtali (14, 15, 18). But she also sings about the pew-sitters.

For instance, in verse 15 Deborah says there was “great searchings of heart” in the districts of Reuben. She repeats the phrase in verse 16. This indicates that men from Reuben thought about coming to the battle. They even talked about it, apparently talked a lot. But in the end they stayed home by their safe campfires while their brothers faced the enemy without their help.

According to verse 17, men from Gilead (he’s a grandson of Manasseh) did the same. So did men from Dan, they had business obligations in the shipping industry. So did those living over on the Mediterranean coast in Asher, who didn’t get involved because Sisera wasn’t bothering them.

We’re safe. That’s all that matters to us. It’s not our problem if our brothers need our help. Am I my brother’s keeper?

And worst of all were the men from Meroz (23). We don’t know where Meroz was, but we know what they received from Deborah. A *curse*, in verse 23. “‘Curse Meroz,’ said the angel of the LORD. ‘Curse its people bitterly, because they did not come to help the LORD, to help the LORD against the mighty.’”

Now that’s serious. Yes, God is sovereign which means He will win the battle. But that doesn’t excuse passivity on the part of His people. And when He gives us the opportunity to partner with Him in fighting for righteousness, we’d better not rest on our laurels. And when our brothers and sisters are in need, and we do nothing, He will meet their needs, and He will hold us accountable for loving in word only and not in deed.

In the third movement of the song...

¹⁰ Dale Ralph Davis, p. 83.

C. Deborah sang about what happened to two women at the end of the battle (24-30). Notice verse 24, “Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, most blessed of tent-dwelling women.”

Do you see the contrast? At the end of the second movement, Meroz is cursed. Why? Because he didn’t help. But Jael is blessed. Why? Because she did help. She risked her own life to partner with God in rescuing His oppressed people.

How did she do it? Deborah sings about it in verses 25-27, “He asked for water, and she gave him milk; in a bowl fit for nobles she brought him curdled milk. Her hand reached for the tent peg, her right hand for the workman’s hammer. She struck Sisera, she crushed his head, she shattered and pierced his temple. At her feet he sank, he fell; there he lay. At her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell—dead.”

This is quite a song, isn’t it? You say, “Yea, and I still don’t get it. This song is so graphic and gory and vicious!”

To us it is, but that’s because we’re sitting in an air-conditioned room right now, in America, and we’re used to justice and bad guys getting thrown behind bars. My friend, what we’re reading right now in the pages of God’s Word is the *real world*.

The reason we struggle to sing a song that celebrates God defeating an oppressive enemy, blow by blow, is because most of us have never experienced oppression. I know I haven’t, not like this, for sure. I’ve never watched soldiers come into my village, put a sword to my throat and rape my wife and daughters, like Sisera and his men did for twenty years to Israelite villages. If I had, I suppose I could sing this song, not out of vengeance, but to the praise of the just God who put the oppressor in his rightful place. And to the praise of the merciful God who *didn’t* put me in that same place, which is exactly what I deserve for the untold sins I’ve committed against Him.

Praise God for women like Jael! says Deborah. She’s a blessed woman, and we can learn from her.

1. *Like Jael, the blessed woman is the one who is willing to fight for the honor of God, no matter what the cost.* Praise God for self-denying warrior women! Praise God for women who say no to the self-promoting agendas they hear about from Hollywood, and read about in the fashion magazines, who fight for their marriages when it would be easier to run, who fight for the souls of their kids even when their kids are breaking their hearts, who fight for their own purity in a cesspool society. And they fight no matter what the cost, because they’re living for the honor of the God who saved their soul!

But the sad reality is that not all women are like Jael. Some are like the woman Deborah sings about next, in verses 28-30. “Through the window peered Sisera’s mother; behind the lattice she cried out, ‘Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why is the clatter of his chariots delayed?’ The wisest of her ladies answer her; indeed, she keeps saying to herself, ‘Are they not finding and dividing the spoils: a girl or two for each man¹¹, colorful garments as plunder for Sisera, colorful garments embroidered, highly embroidered garments for my neck— all this as plunder?’”

There’s a foolish woman, and we should learn from her. That’s why Deborah’s singing about her. Ladies (and men), it boils down to this.

2. *Like Sisera’s mother, the foolish woman thinks her family exists for her.* The contrast is striking. Jael is a tent-dweller, a fearless fighter who puts her life on the line for her God and her country.

¹¹ The ESV gives the blunt literal reading, “A womb or two for every man.”

But not Sisera's mother. She's a pampered woman of the world living in a luxurious home. See her there, standing behind the lattice, peering through the window? Her son drives a chariot and she's proud of it. He's a powerful man, important too, and she'll tell you so because it makes her look good. She defines success in terms of achievement and accumulation, namely her son's. She brags about her son's conquests. He's got women. He's got a wardrobe to kill. And best of all, he makes life good for me.

And she makes excuses for him, too. My boy's okay, just late because he got detained at work. Detained alright. By a stake through his head.

But that's not the end of the song. There's one more verse.

D. Deborah sang about what she wanted as a result of the battle (31). Her request? Verse 31 says "So may all your enemies perish, O LORD! But *your friends* be like the sun as he rises in his might." Listen to the NIV, "So may all your enemies perish, O LORD! But may they *who love you* be like the sun when it rises in its strength."

What did Deborah want? She wanted what the Lord wanted, for people to be God's *friends*, to *love the Lord*. This is what the old covenant was all about (Deut. 6:5 "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength"). And the new covenant, too.

This is why she fought, and why she risked her life and went to the battle zone, because she wanted people to love the Lord who loved her and whom she loved.

Implications: What do we learn from Deborah and Jael?

Three take-aways.

1. *We need women who treasure the pleasure of God above all else.* More than fashion, for sure, but even more than blessings like family. We need women who treasure the pleasure of God above all else. Is that true of you?

2. *We need women who are willing to fight for the honor of their God.* This is not a time for us to coast home in pampered living. There's a war going on, and we need to get involved. How? We need to turn off the distractions, and pray fervently for our kids and grandkids and neighbors' kids. We need to ask God to save them from the evil one and the evils with which he entices them. We need to invest our God-given money and time in ways that will make Christ known. We need to people who fear the Lord and fight for His honor.

3. *We need to give honor to such women.* And I do that right now. I am so thankful for you ladies who are saying no to the world and no to yourself, because what matters most to you is the honor of God. We bless you. We honor you. We thank you.

And together, as we come to the Table, we honor and thank the One who makes this possible, whose grace is greater than all our sin.

Closing Song: #201 "*Grace Greater Than Our Sin*" (all four verses)

Communion

May Benediction: 2 Thessalonians 3:16 (NIV)