

Judges 4

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Date: 27 October 2024

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. I invite you to take your copy of God's Word and turn to Judges chapter 4. In *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan, Christian, the primary character, tells his companion the story of another allegorical character by the name of Little Faith.

Little Faith, on his journey to the celestial city, falls asleep for a time and upon waking is assaulted by three rogues who are called faint heart, guilt, and mistrust.

Allegorically, these all exist within this character, Little Faith. They rob him and they leave him barely enough to finish his journey.

In Mark chapter 9, the father of a boy with an unclean spirit comes to Jesus and says, If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.

And Jesus replies to him, If you can, all things are possible. For one who believes, immediately the father of the child cried out and said, I believe, help my unbelief.

[1 : 21] Mark chapter 9. Jesus subsequently heals the boy. Little Faith's faith was small.

He was troubled by a lack of courage and trust, yet he reached the celestial city and was welcomed there. The boy's father expressed a mixture of belief and doubt, yet the Lord of healing healed his boy.

Faltering faith. Faltering faith. Small faith, but sufficient faith. Do you ever identify with these characters?

Feel like you are just barely hanging on? I do at times. In fact, you may notice in your bulletin that it says Judges chapters 13 through 16, which was the story of Samson.

And I decided in this week I would rather study and consider the story we're going to see in Judges chapter 4 for my own sake. And so, in today's text, there's another character, little faith kind of character.

[2 : 34] And I hope that our consideration of him, as it served my soul, will also be of great encouragement to your soul today. So, Judges chapter 4, before I lead us in reading it, beloved, this is God's word to us, written for his glory and our good.

And so, we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and to obey its commands. Judges chapter 4, beginning in verse 1.

And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord after Ehud died. And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor.

The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Heresheth Hagoyim. Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord for help, for he had 900 chariots of iron, and he oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for 20 years.

Now, Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She 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.

[3 : 47] She sent and summoned Barak, the son of Abinoam, from Kadesh 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?

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. Barak said to her, If you go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go.

And 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.

Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kadesh. Excuse me, Barak. I'm trying to say it differently than the president's name. Barak. And Barak called out Zebulun and Naphtali to Kadesh,

and 10,000 men went up at his heels, and Deborah went up with him. Now Heber, the Kenite, had separated from the Kenites the descendants of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Za'ananim, which is near Kadesh.

[5 : 09] When Sisera was told that Barak, the son of Abinoam, had gone up from Mount Tabor, Sisera called out all his chariots, 900 chariots of iron, and all the men who were with him, from Heresheth, Hogoyim, to the river Kishon.

And Deborah said to Barak, For this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hands. Does not the Lord go out before you?

So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him. And the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword.

And Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot. And Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Heresheth, Hogoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword.

Not a man was left. But Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.

[6 : 13] 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.

And he said to her, Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty. So she opened a skin of milk and gave him a drink and covered him. And he said to her, Stand at the opening of the tent, and if any man comes and asks you, is anyone here, say no.

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 to the ground while he was lying fast asleep from weariness.

So cool. So he died. And behold, as Barak was pursuing Sisera, Jael went out to meet him and said to him, Come and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.

So he went into her tent, and there lay Sisera dead with a tent peg in his temple. So on that day God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan before the people of Israel.

[7 : 19] And the hand of the people of Israel pressed harder and harder against Jabin the king of Canaan until they destroyed Jabin king of Canaan. Now I shared with you last week as we overviewed the book of Judges that a pattern is presented in the text, which is seen in today's chapter very clearly.

Number one, the people rebel. There's the death of one of the judges, and some time passes, and the people rebel. We see this in verse one. And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord after Ehud died.

So that's the first step in the pattern that we see. Secondly, we see that God hands them over to the people of the land. In this case, it's into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor.

So there's this regional thing going on in the land at this time. So it's likely this area that's under the command of Jabin the king. And we see that he has a commander, a general by the name of Sisera, and a mighty army.

And that's what's being communicated to us in verse three. And the reason that people cry out for help is there's this insurmountable army of 900 chariots of iron.

[8 : 39] It was like the tanks of their day. And we see that Jabin oppresses the people of Israel cruelly for a time of 20 years.

So that's the second step. God in judgment hands them over to the people of the land. Thirdly, we see that God shows them mercy by raising up a judge.

And in this case, most commentators agree two judges in the form of Deborah and Barak. So you'll see them often in lists, Deborah slash Barak, that they together were judging at this time and delivering Israel from their oppressors.

Now in Hebrew, the name Deborah means to pronounce. And we will see why that's such a fitting name for her in just a moment. At this point, we're not going to focus most of our attention on Deborah today, but rather on Barak.

But I want to address the egalitarian argument that Deborah serving as a judge in the book of Judges justifies women serving in the office of pastor. We believe that the office of pastor or elder, same word, congruous, is reserved for qualified men.

[9 : 59] And both of these stipulations are important. Men, but not just men, but qualified men, are to hold the office.

And today is not for a sermon on that in particular, but this is what we believe the office is meant to who it is meant to be held by. Deborah is undoubtedly used of God in this instance in Israel's history.

Women generally have been and are most certainly used by God in the life of His church. We have every reason to be incredibly thankful for the beautiful ways that the women of our church are vital to the function of our church.

Very important to be sure. Ladies, we are extremely grateful for you. But it is reckless hermeneutics that want to draw parallels between the office that Deborah holds here and the church office of pastor.

So I just want to take that off the table for us. Deborah, in this episode, is the person of greater faith. She is more to be emulated in this chapter.

[11 : 15] We're going to focus, as I said, much of our attention on Barak today, but not for his superior faith, but rather his weakness of faith.

Of interest and perhaps in clever juxtaposition, the Hebrew name Barak means lightning. So this general of Israel's army, General Lightning, will need the prompting of Deborah to carry out God's purpose for him.

I think that's meant to be striking, especially to readers of Hebrew, that this guy, General Lightning, Deborah has to approach and remind him of what God had said to him.

So that was the third step. God shows mercy to his people by raising up a judge. Fourthly, the judge, by God's help, delivers the Israelites, and they have rest.

And so we see that in verse 23 and 24. On that day, God subdued Jabin, the king of Canaan, before the people of Israel. Earlier in the chapter, we see that the people are routed, and I wish we had more storyline there to understand how it is that those people were conquered.

[12 : 36] But I think the point where our fixation is supposed to be is that God accomplished it. The details of exactly how they fought that battle are not terribly important. What is important is that God did that work, these 10,000 men against this mighty army with these 900 chariots of metal.

So on that day, God subdued Jabin, the king of Canaan, before the people of Israel. And the hand of the people of Israel pressed harder and harder against Jabin, the king of Canaan, until they destroyed Jabin, king of Canaan.

And then, at the end of chapter 5, which records a song sung by Deborah and Barak, we read, And the land had rest for 40 years.

So we see that cycle once again. The judge, by God's help, delivers the Israelites, and they have rest. But then, the last step, the judge dies, and the people return to their wickedness.

Remember, I read to you in verse 1, right? It was Israel again being wicked because Ehud had died. And then we see in Judges chapter 6 and verse 1, The people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

[13 : 51] And the Lord then gives them into the hand of Midian, and the cycle goes round and round. So there is this framework re-presented to you and seen clearly in chapter 4.

I also want you to remember the repeated stanza toward the end of the book. In those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

You see this in places like Judges 21 and verse 25. Israel needed a king. This reality is temporally fulfilled in the ascension and reign of King David.

We talked about this a little bit last week. Saul was given to them as the king that they deserved, and he did not serve them well. They were meant to wait on the Lord and have the king that he intended for them to have, which we see temporal fulfillment in King David.

But ultimately, we see this fulfillment in the ascension and present reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. David was always meant to show God's people a greater king that would come and have an imperishing reign.

[15 : 12] The totality of the Old Testament speaks of promises made. The totality of the New Testament speaks of promises kept.

Let's not forget this morning, as we look at this story with minds toward Barak, that this book speaks loudly to us of Christ. The failings of the people are meant to show us we need a savior and a king who will reign forever.

At the beginning of this chapter, after the introduction of the oppression that Israel is experiencing, we are introduced to Deborah, who is working at the task that we more readily associate with the title of judge.

We see most of the judges are just coming in there slaying the enemy, but here we see her, this prophetess, this wife of Lapidoth. Lapidoth, the Hebrew actually means of Lapidoth, so maybe a city, but here it's translated the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time.

And we get some clarification on that in verse 5 as she sits under a palm that's named after her, her palm tree, the palm of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim.

[16:32] And the people of Israel came up to her for judgment. They were coming to her and bringing her questions. Help us to settle this matter between us, and this is what she is doing.

I mentioned a moment ago that in Hebrew, the name Deborah means to pronounce. Additionally, we see her called a prophetess. And I think the significance of the name and the role are made evident to us in the next two verses.

Notice what she does at the beginning of verse 6. She sent and summoned Barak, the son of Abinoam from Kadesh Naphtali. She brings him to her and says 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 Kashan with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand.

Deborah brings Barak before her and does not tell him something new. She's not received a word from the Lord that she's now passing along to him.

She's asking him a question. Didn't God say, Do such and such, and I will accomplish? Hasn't God commanded you to do something, promised your success in the carrying out of the task, and yet you have not done it?

[18:04] That's the implied question that hangs there at the end. Barak, General Lightning, has failed to believe God's word.

God himself has spoken this word to him, and nothing has happened. And this is why Deborah summons him and asks him this question. We have no indication of how much time has passed between God speaking to Barak and Deborah speaking to Barak.

But it has been enough time that God is using Deborah to prompt Barak to action. Why has Barak failed to believe God's word?

I suggest to you that he is being driven by fear. He's observing the state of the enemy. He is saying, How could it be possible that God would do this thing for us?

Because look, they have 900 chariots of iron. There's this cruel oppression going on we see in verse 3.

[19:13] And Barak doesn't believe that God will, in spite of that, deliver his people. At this point, we want to think Barak so ridiculous.

God has made a promise. Why are you afraid, Barak? I want to wag my head at him for the shame of his weak faith. But you and I, we are just like Barak.

I really desire to identify more readily with Deborah or with JL. But in this story, in this chapter, I am most like Barak.

You are most like Barak. We have a record of promises made and promises kept. We have clear commandments given to us and yet we fail to believe God's Word.

We are prompted by others. The reading of the Bible or a good book explaining the Bible. The counsel of a dear, wise friend. The hearing of a sermon.

[20:26] Barak's faith was small. He expressed this further in his response to Deborah. Barak said to her, this is a striking verse, if you will go with me, I will go.

But if you will not go with me, I will not go. So just on the very surface, right, Barak has been given a commission, a charge by God, and a guarantee of success.

There's no doubt about God's Word there. He will accomplish this task. I will give him into your hand, is what God says there in verse 7.

And the response in verse 8 is if you will go with me, Deborah, I will go. But if you will not go with me, I will not go. It's an astounding little faith response.

But it's even more so that if this phrase draws your mind to another time that a similar thing was said. Back in Exodus chapter 33 in verse 15, this is after the golden calf incident, and there's some interaction between Moses and God and some reissuing of promise.

[21 : 46] And then Moses says to God in verse 15, if your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. Moses' request there is a good and legitimate one.

It has as the proper object of faith God Himself. And I think this record of Barak's response is meant to draw out that juxtaposition.

Little things are supposed to fire off in our brain and go, whoa, whoa, whoa. This is not an act of faith at all. In whom is Barak trusting?

He seems to be placing his faith in Deborah rather than the God who issued the command and who made the promise. His request is even more shameful when you consider that Deborah is a woman.

If you were to read the biblical narrative through, you would remember in Joshua chapter 1, and verse 14, the following command. Your wives, your little ones, and your livestock shall remain in the land that Moses gave you beyond the Jordan.

[22 : 56] But all the men of valor among you shall pass over armed before your brothers and shall help them. It's an aside, but it's the shame of a nation when it sends its women to fight its wars.

If you're reading this narrative through, right, if you're seeing this very command given, the men were meant to go and conquer the land back in Joshua 1 and verse 14.

They failed to do that task, and now we see this general, Barak, general lightning, requesting that Deborah go with him to the war.

And astute readers should see both Barak's lack of faith and his subsequent request as so shameful.

But beloved, we do the very same thing. We fail to believe God's word, and we look to alternative means to see his promises fulfilled, rather than just trusting that our God, who has spoken, will do exactly what he said he will do.

[24 : 07] Now, in spite of all that, in spite of that small faith of Barak, he goes up. He goes. And God is faithful to his word.

We see in verse 15, And the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword. So they fight.

We see the evidence of that, right? The sword itself is taking place, but the emphasis is placed on the Lord doing this work. How is it possible if they defeated him?

I don't know. Again, I wish we had the details, but we're meant to see that it's God himself who accomplished it. God uses Barak's small, but sufficient faith and accomplishes his purpose on behalf of his people.

However, this is not without its temporal judgment on Barak. Remember, back in verse 9, Deborah says, I will go with you, nevertheless.

[25 : 11] The road on which you are going will not lead to your glory. This small faithness for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.

And we see that to be the case in just a few short verses. Barak is denied the praise of defeating Sisera because, as we read, it is J.L.

who deals the final blow. It's an incredible account and it's just one of my favorites. The Bible is full of stories that eclipse the fiction of our days.

We have limitless resource to make great movies from the Scripture. But I want to leave off this account at this point. There's much that can be said about it.

But I want to leave it off with this weak, sufficient faith of Barak in mind and take you elsewhere in the Bible. So if you will, please join me in Hebrews chapter 10.

[26 : 32] I just want to pick up the last verse of Hebrews chapter 10. So verse 39 and then we're going to read a little bit into chapter 11. The book of Hebrews is being written to encourage those Christians, this little church we believe is meeting out on the outskirts of Rome, largely made up of, perhaps not exclusively, but largely made up of Jewish converts to Christ.

They had suffered much. We see the evidence of that throughout the pages of the book of Hebrews. Hebrews. And it's meant to press them on. And so in verse 39, the author of Hebrews says, we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

And then he defines faith in chapter 11 and verse 1. Now, faith is the assurance of things and the conviction of things not seen.

It's a confidence. What we hope will come to pass, what God has said will come to pass, will in fact come to pass. For by it, verse 2 says, the people of old received their commendation or you could think approval.

They were accepted by that faith in the promises of God. And the author of Hebrews then runs a litany of examples of faith.

[28 : 05] You may have heard this called the hall of faith. Like you would picture walking down it and there's pictures of these individuals hung on the walls as you walk down it. Again, meant to strengthen this poor, beleaguered little church.

People with a small faith. They're being encouraged throughout this chapter. And he lists off a bunch of different people but then in Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 32, read with me what he says, and what more shall I say?

For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets.

The author lists four judges from the book of Judges. He lists four of them. He could have selected any of the judges or any other characters for that matter.

There's a bunch of characters of faith in the scripture. But as he's saying, I don't have time to talk in total about these people. In all of this, this great list of faith, Barak.

[29 : 14] Not Deborah. Not J.L. But Barak. Of all people makes this list. And I am convinced that his name sits there in Hebrews 11 to encourage our small but sufficient faith.

I need Barak to sit in Hebrews chapter 11 and go to this story and see this man who just seems to barely pull it off. The power of the army at his fingertips.

The promise of God that Cicero would be delivered into his hands and yet he waits for Deborah to prompt him to promise to go with him and then he finally acts.

And we see that God does exactly what he said that he would do. and then we find him in Hebrews 11 being mentioned as a man meant to spur us on to further faith.

I am so glad this connection was made in my mind as I was reading through the judges and preparing for this. I know that name. Somewhere else in the Bible.

[30 : 33] Somewhere else I've seen the name Barak. Where? And here it was sitting right here in verse 32 of Hebrews 11. Beloved, the life of Barak ought to be of great encouragement to our souls.

Not because he's some massive hero of the faith. Let's all be like Barak. No, but rather because God is so gracious to his people even in his people's weakness.

Barak should encourage our souls and the author of Hebrews agrees. He goes on in chapter 12 verse 1. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses including this Barak, let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Let us be encouraged by the little faith of Barak who acted all the same in all of his weakness and God accomplished his task through him.

The author of Hebrews doesn't leave us off there. He takes us on to verse 2. Not looking to Barak, I think we could read here, but rather looking to Jesus.

[31 : 55] The man of perfect faith, the founder, the establisher, and the perfecter of our faith. Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

And so if we have for us this Jesus that's gone before us, who lived the perfect life that we needed, died the death that we deserved and is seated at God's right hand now.

And we are being cheered on by all of them. And so there's a single application for today. Often I start out sermons by telling you what the points are going to be.

You notice I did not do that. There's one single point. All of us at times are going to struggle with our faith. Do we believe that the things that God has said to be true are in fact true?

And do we orient our lives in accordance with it? And we should be greatly encouraged by the life of Barak, mentioned in this great list of people of faith.

[33 : 06] That work that God has begun in us, he will bring to a close at the day of Christ. Press on, dear Christian. The celestial city is closer than you think.

Let's pray together.