

DEBORAH AND BARAK

JUDGES 4-5

From the land of fiction, can you pick where these pairings come from: Maxwell Smart and Agent 99, Crockett and Tubbs, Sherlock and Watson, Starsky and Hutch?? Now we get to another pairing but this time from the history of Israel, Deborah and Barak. This is an unusual pair who in their relationship express both tension and joy. But this isn't so much a story about Deborah and Barak, it's a story about someone else.....

Read Judges 4:1-11

1. What situation are the Israelites facing in v 1-3? Does this remind you of any other situations they've faced?
2. Why do you think the narrator makes such a big deal about the iron chariots (see Judges 1:19)?
3. What strikes you about this judge?
4. How is Barak portrayed? How does he compare with Deborah?
5. Who's going to end up with the glory from this campaign?
6. How do you feel about what Barak has said and Deborah's response?

Undoubtedly circumstances were unsettling for Barak. The enemy was armed with iron chariots, giving them an overwhelming advantage against Israel's infantry. And on top of that, things within Israel weren't fitting in with the established pattern. This time the judge was a woman and a prophetess. And this time the judge was not the deliverer. Deborah had outsourced that task to Barak. Yet by laying down a condition, Barak calls into question the certainty of God's promise. God grants his request but he is informed that his lack of faith will mean he will receive no honour from the deliverance.

Read Judges 4:12-24

7. What happens in the battle?

8. What kind of reception would Sisera have expected to find with Jael and Heber (v17)?

9. How does Jael add to these expectations (v18-19)?

10. How would you describe Jael?



11. Does Sisera's downfall remind you of any other events you've seen in Judges? How?

12. How does the end of the story fit with what Deborah said would happen?

As with Ehud in chapter 3, God chooses an unlikely deliverer to rescue his people. Rather than general Barak, God uses a non-Israelite woman who's clan is allied with the enemy!

13. Does God still prefer to use people like Jael today (have a look at 1 Cor 1:26-31)? Why?

Read Judges 5

Deborah and Barak team up for a duet and they retell the story from a different perspective that adds several new notes.

14. What worrying development does the song lament in v 15-18?

It seems that like their general, many of the Israelite tribes aren't interested in joining the fight against God's enemies. They want to stay at home with their sheep. This will be an increasing problem as we go on through Judges.

15. How is the victory pictured in v 4-5; 19-23?

16. What is the tone of v 24-31?

17. How does this kind of celebration of a victory make you feel?

18. Barak's song celebrates Sisera's downfall in graphic and joyful terms. This can make us feel uncomfortable. Does the New Testament celebrate God's judgement in this way?

19. What is it that makes God's judgement a good thing?

20. Should we celebrate God's judgement? What dangers might there be?