

Our God Will Go Before Us

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[0 : 0 0] A few months ago, we learned a modern hymn by Matt Boswell and Matt Papa called, Our God Will Go Before Us. Here's how the chorus goes, if you don't remember. Our God will go before us.

The Lord of hosts is with us. Oh, praise the one who leads us on, for his grace will bring us home. The setting of that song is Exodus chapter 33.

Perhaps you remember God is kind of fed up with the Israelites at Mount Sinai. And he comes and he tells Moses, I'm going to give the people the land and I'm going to send my angel before you, but I'm not going with you.

And you remember what Moses did. He intercedes on behalf of the people and he says, God, if you're not going, we're not going. I'm not going. We're going to where you go.

We need you with us. And of course, God is pleased by Moses' prayer and his intercession. And he comes back and he says, we'll tell you what, I'm not only going to give you the land, but my very presence is going to go before you into the land.

[1 : 0 7] Guaranteeing victory for them as they would fight battle by battle. Guaranteeing blessing for them as they wandered through the wilderness as they ultimately went into the land of promise.

And it's a wonderful story there in Exodus 33. But it's really not unique to Moses. It's not the only time that we see God's people looking at God in this way, thinking, if you're not going with this, we're not going.

And it's not the only time ever that we see the promise of God's presence in the scriptures either. In fact, this section of Exodus 33 really is part of a thread that courses through all of the scripture, showing God's presence and power to save and to lead his people.

And the story that we find in Judges 4 and 5 is another part of this amazing thread of grace that goes through the scriptures.

And of course, like all of the narratives in this particular book, the main point is this. The main point of this story is God saves his people.

[2 : 1 8] We must say it every Sunday as we're working through this book because that is the point of the book and it's the point of all of the stories. God saves his people and he does it out of amazing steadfast love and mercy.

And there's a number of features in this passage that make this apparent to us. Dale Ralph Davis hopefully shows that this chapter, chapter 4 at least, has a chiastic structure.

And we've talked about that a lot. We talked about that a lot in our study of the seven churches in Revelation. We've seen this literary technique at other places in Judges as well. He sees this as another chiastic structure, at least in chapter 4, with the central focus falling on verse 14.

Set your eyes on verse 14, would you? And Deborah said to Barak, Up, for this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand.

Does not the Lord go out before you? Now that's helpful, isn't it? It's helpful when the Lord uses the literary artistry of the people, the humans that he used to write his word, to help us come to a better understanding of the point.

[3 : 35] And even as we look at just the basic structure of how this chapter is laid out, when we get to the heart of it, what do we see? Has not the Lord gone out before you? This is the day that the Lord will deliver Sisera, your enemy, into your hand.

But you don't have to acknowledge the chiasm to see the point. The fingerprints of God's saving action are all over both of these chapters.

Not only does the author explicitly say at the end of chapter 4 that it was God who subdued Jabin before the people of Israel, but the song of Deborah and Barak in chapter 5 is a song of worship, specifically praising God for his saving work in their lives.

There is no getting around what the bottom line of this text is. The bottom line is that God alone can save his people. He alone can provide salvation.

And no enemy, no enemy will ever prevail against those on whom he has set his steadfast love, his saving love.

[4 : 49] No enemy. Jesus says this in a different way about the church. He says, This church is my church. On this confession, Peter, I will build my church.

And the gates of hell themselves cannot prevail against it. And this becomes so abundantly clear in this story. And significant to this particular record is that it gives us so much information about how God delivered Israel.

It's unique, at least in the stories that we've seen up to this point, the other judges, we see that God raises up a judge and that he delivers. But in this text, we start to get a lot of information about how God actually went about doing that.

And the story is recorded in two distinct forms. In chapter 4, it's told in simple prose or narrative form. But in chapter 5, the whole story is repeated in poetry, in song.

And we're going to examine both of these accounts in tandem as we go through the message today. Chapter 5 expounding upon the story that's laid out for us in chapter 4.

[6 : 02] And of course, there is an abundance of spiritual lessons for us as we go through. If you like to keep notes and you want to keep track of my personal breakdown of the text, then write this down first.

First thing we see here is a ruthless enemy. A ruthless enemy. Look at the first three verses of chapter 4. And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.

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 Harasheth 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.

So this seemingly endless cycle of apostasy continues with Israel after Ahud's death. And despite God graciously giving the people in their land 80 years of peace and rest, the people of Israel persist in their disobedience.

[7 : 12] They persist in idolatry and were told again doing what was evil in the sight of the Lord. And then the cycle of that continues once again. The Lord himself sells them into the hand of Jabin, the king of Canaan, or a Canaanite king who was ruling at this point in the northern region near Galilee.

So Hazor is probably 12 miles or so north of the Sea of Galilee. So you think where you read of Jesus' ministry, primarily headquartered in the New Testament, where he was raised, all of the action happening in this story is in that particular region of Israel.

Jabin, though, isn't the character on which the story focuses its attention. Instead, the primary enemy in view throughout this chapter is a man named Sisera, who ruthlessly oppressed the people with this massive show of military power.

Now, it's easy for us to read through a verse like that or even a phrase like that and not think so much about what this experience was like. So maybe it would be helpful for us for just a moment to consider what happens when an enemy king takes over.

This is an enemy occupation of their land and of their homes. First thing an occupying army will want to do is have a dramatic show of power.

[8 : 49] And that dramatic show of power crushes any thoughts of a village uprising against them, right? And how do they do that? They show great strength.

And as they come in to take over the particular land, it involves a lot of murder. That's how you scare the people, right? That's how you convince them not to uprising against you.

And here we're told Sisera has basically these ancient tanks, 900 iron chariots. It was a tremendous show of power. And he clearly wasn't afraid to use them because then we're told that he cruelly oppresses the people of Israel for 20 years.

That's what life is like when an occupying enemy comes into town. And what else do they do? Once they come into town, they begin to set up their forms of government and they oppress the people.

Enemy occupation usually results in a seizure of private property. Your home is no longer your home. Your home belongs to whoever wants it from the enemy army.

[9 : 55] And if you want to resist them, they'll just take your life and take your home anyways. Seizure of property. That's not it. Heavy regulation.

They keep you from having all the things that you need to flourish in life. High taxation comes along with this. It makes everyday life absolutely miserable for the subjugated people.

And Deborah's song gives us a brief look that conveys these conditions. Just flip over to chapter 5 and look at verses 6 through 8.

In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were abandoned. The travelers kept to the byways. So the first thing we find in the song is the people can't travel freely.

They can't just, in peace, go where they want to go because they know there's a great threat. There's a great danger there. Can you imagine living in that kind of scenario? Here you've spent however many years of your life enjoying peace and liberty and freedom here in the United States or North Carolina or whatever it is.

[10 : 59] And then suddenly, like's happening in Israel right now to this weekend, suddenly an enemy army comes in and tries to invade. And now you don't have the right to just go wherever you want to go. You don't have the freedom to travel where you want to travel.

In fact, if you even tried to, you're probably going to lose your life or at least be hurt in a significant way. She continues, the villagers ceased in Israel. People aren't leaving their homes and the ones that do are dying.

They ceased to be until I, I, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel. When new gods were chosen, that is leaders of towns and armies, then war was in the gates.

Was shield or spear to be seen among 40,000 in Israel? This is part of regulation. What's the first thing the enemy army does? They come in and they take the weapons because they don't want you to come back at them, do they?

So people, they don't have sword, they don't have spear in Israel anymore because Jabin the king and Sisera, his right-hand man, have taken over. But the truth is, when an occupying army comes in like this, substantial regulation and taxation, that's nothing compared to the personal loss and tragedy that comes with an experience like this.

[12 : 15] Personal property is stolen as spoils of war. The men that weren't killed were enslaved. Their wives and their daughters raped and trafficked among the people that have come in.

At the end of Deborah's song, she tells this story or she gives this imagery of Sisera's mom after Sisera's been defeated. Sorry if I just spoiled the story for you, but Sisera loses.

And we get to the end and she presents this imagery of Sisera's mom is hanging out the window and she's wondering, why is it taking him so long to get home and to console her? There are these princesses who say, well, it takes time to do everything that Sisera and the army are doing.

And read with me what they expect the army to have been doing. Chapter 5, verse 28. Out of the window she peered, the mother of Sisera welled through the lattice.

Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the hoofbeats of his chariots? Her wisest princess's answer. Indeed, she answers herself. Have they not found and divided the spoil?

[13 : 23] Do you know what that means? They're going house to house. They're taking what they want. They're leaving nothing behind. A womb or two for every man? They take your wives.

They take your daughters. They treat them like slaves. They take advantage of them. Spoil of dyed materials for Sisera. Spoiled of dyed materials embroidered.

Two pieces of dyed work embroidered for the neck. Embroidered for the neck. I spoil. That's what it's like when an enemy army comes in. For 20 years.

For 20 years. Israel lives in that condition. But as ruthless of an enemy as Sisera was.

He wasn't their greatest enemy. Israel's fiercest, most ruthless enemy. Was their own sin.

[14 : 21] That's their greatest enemy here. Sisera. Sisera was only an issue. Because they persisted in rejecting God. Because they continued to disobey.

Because they continued to abandon him. And to pursue the gods of Canaan instead. And so even after times of peace. And after giving them more than enough time.

To see the error of their way. And to turn away from that error. And that sin. And to turn back to God. Still they wasted God's kindness. As Paul says. Storing up wrath for themselves.

On the day of wrath. When God's righteous judgment would be revealed. And God's righteous judgment did ultimately come. And it came in the form of Jabin king of Canaan.

And Sisera with his 900 chariots and his army. That were doing whatever they wanted to do. To the people of Israel. And the people were left crying out to the God.

[15 : 20] That they had rejected. Over and over. And over and over. When I was growing up.

The senior saints in our church would often remind me. Sin will take you farther than you want to go. Sin will keep you longer than you want to stay.

Sin will cost you far more than you want to pay. Is that not the story of Israel? Every time. Every time.

But to be honest with you. This is nothing compared to what hell will be. For those who do not know the Lord. Isn't that the parallel for us? We see the destructive consequences of sin.

And as believers we see that. And we see okay yes. We face the corrective judgment of the Lord. But then we look around at the unbelievers in our lives. And we see they do not face the corrective judgment of the Lord. They face the punitive judgment of the Lord.

[16 : 22] The conditions for Israel under the reign of Jabin king of Canaan. Is nothing compared to what eternity will be like in a devil's hell. Nothing. And yet God is still so kind.

That's just to extend his mercy over and over and over to you and to the people in your life. If they will but turn to him and trust in Christ they'll be forgiven.

They'll be restored. And yet they wasted it just like Israel wasted it. It's a reminder that what Israel really needed was something that none of these deliverers could actually provide for them.

They needed someone who would not only save them from an enemy occupation. But from the depravity of their sinful hearts. They needed new hearts.

They needed forgiveness of sin. They needed peace with God. And so do we. And there's only one Savior. Only one.

[17 : 26] Who has ever defeated the enemy. The ruthless enemy. Of sin and death. And it's not Barak. And it's not Ahud. And it's not Samson. It's not any of the others. It's Jesus.

Jesus alone can do this. Romans 8. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

For God has done what the law weakened by the flesh could not do. By sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin.

He condemned sin in the flesh. In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us. Who walk not according to the flesh.

But according to the spirit. There's a ruthless enemy in this story. We see it take shape in the form of a man named Sisera. But really what's behind that is the deep depravity of the hearts of Israel.

[18 : 28] The same depravity that pervades each and every one of our hearts as well. Number two. We see a chosen deliverer. A chosen deliverer.

Now this narrative I told you stands out first because it tells us how God identified and instructed his deliverer.

We haven't got this up to this point. We're just told of Othniel and we're told of Ahud and we're told of Shamgar. But we're really not told how God went about working in that scenario to raise them up.

But this story actually tells us. And God's chosen judge. The deliverer here. Is a man named Barak. He's from the tribe of Naphtali.

And the way his calling takes place is actually quite fascinating. Three things I want to point out to you. And just bear with me as we work through it okay. First thing is this. Let's notice Barak called.

[19 : 25] Barak called. Look at verse 4 of chapter 4. 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. She 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. And I will draw out Sisera. The general of Jabin's army. To meet you by the river Kishon. His chariots and his troops.

And I will give him into your hand. Now look back with me at verse number 4. Now Deborah a prophetess. The wife of Lapidoth. Was judging Israel at that time.

[20 : 24] And this is one of those passages. That makes complementarians like us. Squirm a little bit when we come to it. Right? Complementarian meaning we believe. That God makes men responsible.

For leading their home. And for leading the church. And opponents to this view. Typically we refer to them as egalitarians. Will often point to Deborah. As a proof case.

As a proof case for their particular perspective. Of God's order. And I don't want to get too distracted on it. But since we're here. We might as well deal with it. Right? Deborah is called a prophetess.

In verse 4. That's significant. So we have to start by understanding. And defining what a prophet is. And how they function. A prophet is very simple. A prophet in the Old Testament.

Is a person. A spokesperson for God. To a particular people. And we see this come through. This definition come through very clearly.

[21 : 19] With Moses and Aaron. This verse is on the screen for you. Exodus chapter 7. Says this. The Lord said to Moses. See. I have made you like God. To Pharaoh.

And your brother Aaron. Shall be your prophet. You shall speak. All that I command you. And your brother Aaron. Shall tell Pharaoh. To let the people of Israel.

Go out of his land. So what does a prophet then do? A prophet takes the message. Given to him or her. By God. And communicates it directly. To the people. That God has sent them.

To communicate it to. And then we have to acknowledge also. That prophets like. Elijah. And Samuel. And Isaiah. And though they. Functioned indefinitely.

In Israel. Many of the biblical prophets. Did not have that kind of function. It's not that. Like once you choose your career. And you just get in deep enough.

[22 : 14] Where now this is you're stuck. And this is just what you have to do. That's not always. In fact mostly. That's probably not how it happened. With the Old Testament Israelites. Many times. We see God using a prophet.

Or a prophetess. In a particular moment. To communicate a particular message. In that historical moment. Deborah. Is one of four women.

In the Old Testament. And there's several in the New Testament as well. But Deborah's one of four. In the Old Testament. Who are referred to as a prophetess. In a positive way. Let me just give you the others. And a reference.

And you can look this up if you'd like. First we see Miriam. That's the sister of Moses and Aaron. We find this in Exodus chapter 15. She's called a prophetess.

And she prophesied through a song. So she leads the women with their tambourines. And they sing a song. She's called a prophetess. Because the message of God. To the people.

[23 : 08] And through the people. And through Miriam. Was through this song. She wasn't a prophetess. Just speaking things all the time. It was that particular moment. Right? Then there's this woman named Huldah.

In 2 Kings 24. Or 2 Kings 22. Excuse me. She only appears one time. And she prophesies a message of judgment from God.

To Judah. And a message of blessing from God. To King Josiah. Because he had repented. And God sent a message through Huldah.

The third one is Isaiah's wife. And we find this in Isaiah chapter 8. Now this one's really interesting. She's called a prophetess. But she prophesied through the naming of her son.

So she's pregnant. And God says. I want you to name your son. This name. And it's a really long one. And a really weird one. But I want you to name your son this song. Because that was a message.

[24 : 04] To the nation of Israel. The northern tribes. Of how God was going to judge them. And punish them. And she is called a prophetess. For naming her son.

What God instructs her to name. So we see. That when we. We see prophecy. That's not the same thing as pastor. Absolutely it's not. But it's interesting the way that it functions. And there's different ways that it functions.

Now let's get back to Deborah. Given the context of Judges 4. Deborah's prophetic function. Was limited to this historical moment.

20 years of oppression under Sisera. Deborah. The people are now crying out to God. Please help us. And God decides he's going to speak through this woman.

Named Deborah. To answer their cries. We aren't to assume that Deborah was functioning indefinitely in this role. But the leaders of Israel.

[25 : 01] Were going up to her. To receive the judgment. Not just judgment in general. But the judgment. On this particular cry. To God.

To see what his answer would be. Now remember. Deborah is not the judge in this story. She's not the deliverer. Barak is the judge.

Deborah was the means by which God identified Barak as his instrument of salvation.

Which introduces an interesting question here, doesn't it? Why wouldn't God have just spoken through the priest? Why wouldn't he have just spoken through the high priest? Well, there's an answer for us in the text.

It's where Deborah is situating herself. One of the themes of this story has to do with God using faithful women to fill in the gap left by weak and sinful men.

[26 : 05] That Deborah spoke near but separate from the tabernacle in Shiloh sets her against the Levitical priest. Because all the Levitical priests had started to pursue Baal.

They weren't acting on God's behalf. So God raises up this faithful woman in the absence of faithful men. And he speaks through her this message to the nation of Israel.

He uses her to raise up his judge and his savior and his deliverer that will fight and deliver the people. And here's the thing.

God can and does speak through whomever he chooses. Whoever. Whoever. His use of Deborah does not negate the apostolic command for male headship in the home and the church.

And to insist that it does is a serious biblical misinterpretation and misuse of the Bible. But Deborah does teach us that God's parameters for use in his purposes even within the church are often less rigid than what our parameters are for women's use in the church.

[27 : 21] And we need to take a lesson from this. We need to be careful not to stifle the work of God through faithful women that he does through them by taking the apostolic commands of the New Testament further than what they were ever intended to go.

So, I'll leave it there. Back to your regular scheduled programming here.

God uses Deborah to speak his will to the people of Israel. And she identifies Barak, the son of Abinoam, from Kedesh-Naptali, as the man God has raised up to deliver the people.

God called and instructed Barak and his instruction is clear. He's to gather 10,000 men from Naphtali and Zebulun and on Mount Tabor, which was near Sisera's headquarters.

And once he was there, God was going to draw out Sisera's army and give him into Barak's hand. It's a guaranteed victory from God. All Barak needs to do is obey the Lord's command.

[28 : 35] That's all he has to do. Guaranteed victory. So, we have Barak called. Number two, Barak wavered.

He wavered. Verse eight. Barak said to her, If you will 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.

And Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. Now, let's put ourselves in Barak's sandals for a moment. The instructions from God are clear.

But the Lord has not explained how the victory will actually take place. Do you notice that? God says, I want you to get 10,000 men and go to Mount Tabor. And then I'm going to bring this fierce enemy to you.

[29 : 38] And I'm going to deliver him into your hand. But it doesn't say how he's going to do that. You ever have a sense that God is calling you to something or he's leading your life in a particular way. And you have the spirit and the affirmation of Christians around you and of pastoral leadership in your life.

But it's still pretty scary because you don't know how it's going to work out. And you don't know exactly how God's going to do this thing. This happens every time a Christian decides to get married. And when they find out that they're pregnant with their first child and other things.

You're choosing careers and all this stuff. And you've got a sense of this is what God's doing in my life. But how in the world is this going to work? It's nerve-wracking, isn't it? Now, can you imagine God tells you, I want you to take 10,000 men.

And I want you to go fight this massive army that's way stronger and way better than you. And just trust me, it's going to work out. Well, that would be hard to do, wouldn't it? Israel's army would begin on the protected highland of Mount Tabor.

But eventually, they were going to have to go down into the plain where Sisera's army would meet them with these 900 chariots of iron. And as far as military strategy goes, Barak is smart enough to know this is not a good situation for him.

[30 : 50] And he couldn't foresee how God was actually going to make them victorious. As is typical in the scriptures, what we find here is that God doesn't provide explanations.

He gives promises. And success was only going to come for Barak if he trusted the Lord and obeyed his command.

This is an important lesson. We don't need to quickly dismiss this. We often want God to explain all the details of our lives.

We want him to give us all the plans and lay it out for us. But he just doesn't do that. He never does that. Instead, he gives promises. Promises based on his holiness, based on his perfect character, based on his perfect faithfulness in history.

And what he calls us to do is just trust the promise. Trust the promise and obey the word. And spiritual flourishing in your life and in my life, just like in Barak's life, will only come when you stop asking God for explanations and you just start resting on his promises.

[32 : 05] That's when spiritual flourishing happens. That's when God does the big things in our lives. Not when we get on our knees and we keep demanding that he provide answers, but when we finally just trust what he said and obey what he's instructed.

Now, Barak's response here, it sounds very much like Moses in the verse I quoted earlier, doesn't it? There's one giant difference. Moses tells God in prayer.

He says, God, if you're not going, I'm not going. He bases his movement based on what God has said. And what God has commanded and what God has promised.

Barak is very different. Barak, on the other hand, does not base his response on what God has said. He wouldn't move forward unless Deborah was with him.

This is a problem. His answer is neither yes or no. Revealing a significant weakness in his faith and in his leadership.

[33 : 10] He essentially tries to take the burden of obedience off of himself and put it on Deborah instead. That's what he's doing here. Man, we know what this is like.

Barak is the husband who, when facing a crucial moment of decision and leading his family, puts the final burden of obedience on his wife. God makes clear what his desires are for us.

We see it clearly in the word. And he's laid the responsibility of leading our homes, the responsibility of leading our church, on our shoulders, men. On our shoulders.

And then that crucial moment comes. And after weighing all the evidence and even including the wise counsel of our wives and of other women in our church, even after doing all of that, we'll stop and we'll look at our wife and we'll say, if you don't want to do it, we won't do it.

Or we'll say something of, we looked at all this stuff, just tell me what you want to do. And we're doing exactly what Barak did here.

[34 : 18] We're showing cowardice, weakness, a failure to lead. And we're taking the responsibility that God has given to us, we're taking the burden of that, and we're trying to force it off of our shoulders, and we're trying to force it onto our wives instead.

I'm not talking about wisely gaining counsel from your wives and the process of decision making.

You'd be a fool not to do that. I'm talking about our tendency through a lack of faith and strong leadership to skirt our responsibility to lead.

Christians want to often criticize women who seem to take control of their homes or their churches. But I'm convinced that more often than not, it's not a domineering woman that's the problem.

It's often a cowardly, passive man. And fortunately for us, God isn't afraid to raise up faithful wives and mothers to stand in the gap when their husbands fail to fulfill their God-given responsibility.

[35 : 33] How many times did you go to a church service growing up and you look over and you see that woman who's there, faithful, every Sunday, Sunday after Sunday after Sunday with kids in tow and her husband's nowhere to be found.

What's she doing? She's standing in the gap. She's leading not because she wants to usurp the authority of her husband, but because her husband fails to lead.

Isn't that what Barak's doing here? God says, here's what I want you to do. Here's the promise. I'm going to give you victory. And he looks at Deborah and he says, well, you tell me what you want to do.

Whatever you say, that's what I'm going to do. No. And Deborah's response to Barak's hesitation is not positive. She isn't flattered and Barak isn't praised.

It's quite the opposite, actually. She agreed to go with his army and affirm that God would give them the victory, but she said there would be a significant loss of honor for Barak.

[36 : 34] In our day of radical feminism, Barak would be esteemed for his actions here. But Deborah believed a man should lead like a man has been created to lead.

And the fact that the honor would go to a woman was a statement of judgment, judgment from God on Barak's failure. It's not praise. So we see Barak called.

We see Barak wavered. But now thirdly, then we get to a positive part here. We see Barak obeyed. He obeyed. Verse 10. And Barak called out Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh.

10,000 men went up at his heels. And Deborah went up with him. Now men be encouraged. In the end, Barak did what he was called to do. And God blessed him for it.

Reminding us that no faith and weak faith are very different things. It's not that Barak has no faith.

[37 : 34] He has great faith. But he does falter. And he does have a weak faith. That's not the same thing. Though a weak faith robs us of a measure of blessing and honor, as we see happen with Barak here, a weak faith is not ultimately disqualifying.

In fact, Barak's faith and leadership grow in God's grace as this story progresses. And later passages that refer back to this, they don't mention Deborah. They don't mention Jael.

They mention Barak. 1 Samuel 12, Hebrews 11, emphasize that Barak was God's chosen man who acted with great faith in God's promise.

This is important. Barry Webb explains it this way. He may have forfeited the lesser honor of being the one to kill Sisera, spoiler alert there, but not the far greater honor of being God's agent to rescue his people.

Barak's faith was cautious, qualified at first, but when the command to go came a second time, he did not hesitate. This is important for us to recognize.

[38 : 42] Loved ones, failure in one moment does not mean failure in every moment. Isn't that encouraging?

Here, Barak has this massive failure, this massive show of weakness, and yet, God redeems it. And he shows great faith, and the Lord blesses him, and the Lord uses him.

His hesitation was met by a gracious lesson from God, one that he clearly heard and received. And if you're discouraged by failures of your past, you need to take courage in God's grace to this man and move forward, prepared to trust God's promises and obey his commands.

That's what Barak does, and the Lord uses him tremendously. Okay, are you with me still? We're almost there, a promise, right? We've seen a ruthless enemy. We've seen God's chosen deliverer.

Number three, a decisive victory. A decisive victory. Look at verse 12. When Sisera was told that Barak, the son of Abinoam, had gone up to Mount Tabor, Sisera called out all his chariots, 900 chariots of iron.

[40 : 00] He brings them all, and all the men who were with him from Harasheth Hagoyim to the river Kishon. And Deborah said to Barak, Up, for this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand.

Does not the Lord go out before you? So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him. He's leading in the front, and the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword.

Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot. Now look who the coward is in the story. And Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harasheth Hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword.

Not a man was left. So what do we find? God fulfilled every promise he made to Barak.

Every promise he fulfilled it. Once the army gathered on Mount Tabor, God directed Sisera to go out and to meet them. And he doesn't just send Sisera.

[41 : 09] He directs Sisera's heart so that he takes every one of his soldiers. He takes all 900 of his chariots. God is preparing Barak not for a simple victory.

He is preparing Barak for a decisive victory. Not a single chariot's gonna be left at the end of this thing. Not a single soldier's gonna be left at the end of this story. God is working not salvation only.

He's working total salvation, complete deliverance for his people. And once Sisera's gathered his army, the word of the Lord comes through Deborah again.

Does not the Lord go out before you? And without hesitation, Barak and his men descend into the plain, trusting that God would do as he promised.

But these verses don't tell us how God did it. Chapter five does. Look with me. Chapter five, verses four and five. Lord, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the regions of Edom, the earth trembled.

[42 : 15] The heavens dropped. Yes, the heavens dropped water. The mountains quaked before the Lord. Even Sinai before the Lord, the God of Israel.

Look now down at verse 19 of chapter five. The kings came. They fought. They fought the kings of Canaan at Ta'anak by the waters of Megiddo. They got no spoils of silver.

From heaven, the stars fought. From their courses, they fought against Sisera. The torrent, Kishon, swept them away. The ancient torrent, the torrent, Kishon, march on my soul.

It's an amazing song, isn't it? And it gives us some indication of what God actually did here. And it's fantastic. God harnesses all of creation to do his bidding.

And he does so, so that every person on that battlefield, every person, hearing this story later, every person reading Judges chapter four and five will know one thing is true, that the salvation and the victory belongs to God.

[43 : 20] He brought salvation to his people on that day. And how did he do it? He used rain and storm, earthquake. He raises the waters of the river Kishon and he drowns out the army.

He makes their chariots ineffective. Now can you imagine this? This is why I think this would make such a good movie. Can you imagine this?

Barak is on Mount Tabor. Maybe it's a sunny day. Who knows what's happening? All he knows is God has said I'm supposed to go and Deborah just said now's the time. I can't wait. And he leads his 10,000 men down the mountain.

And maybe he's praying. Lord, I don't know what you're gonna do, but I hope you do it quick. And as he's going down the Mount Tabor into the plain where he sees the vast army of Sisera and the 900 chariots of iron, now perhaps all of a sudden he sees the clouds start to gather behind him and then go out before him and he sees the rain start to fall in front of him.

And as the army's coming down from the mountain, they look out. And now what they see happening in the plain is not an army ready for battle. They see an army that's completely defeated before the battle even begins.

[44 : 34] Why? Because our God has gone before us. The Lord of hosts is with us. Praise the one who leads us home. His grace will lead us home.

Though evil forms against us, the song goes on to say, All heaven will defend us. The gates of hell shall not prevail. For the battle is the Lord's.

What a wonderful, praiseworthy lesson this is. God loads us with his promises and his commands that we trust and obey. And through that faith and obedience, he eventually shows us his mighty hand at work on our behalf.

Isn't this what every unbeliever ultimately has to come to terms with as they're contemplating the person and the work of Jesus Christ? They don't have a lot of explanations. What they have is a promise from God that if you will come to Jesus, if you will trust in him, if you will obey him, you will receive life.

It starts there, but it doesn't finish there every day of our lives. Every moment that our church takes another week forward, meeting in an elementary school and just hoping that more people would come and hear the gospel and that more people would come.

[45 : 53] We're praying this prayer, Lord, I don't know what you're gonna do, but I hope you do something. We're coming down Mount Tabor most days in our lives. And we don't know how it's gonna work out.

But what we can trust is that God's gonna work it out. He's gonna do his work. And the victory is always gonna be decisive. Not a man will be left.

Number four. A meek housewife. A meek housewife. And this is weird, isn't it? You don't expect this. The battle's over, but the story's not.

We gotta deal with this whole thing that Deborah told Barack. The glory's gonna go to a woman, not to you. Because at this point, all the glory has belonged to Sisera, right? As far as human glory is concerned. Not a man was left from the army, but Sisera, the greatest prize of them all, had slipped away.

Somebody's gonna have to go chase him down. And now to find out how exactly that plays out, we have to go back to verse 11. Look at verse 11 with me. Now Heber, the Kenite, had separated from the Kenites.

[47 : 01] The descendants of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak of Zananim, which is near Kedesh. That's a weird insertion, isn't it?

All right. Heber, the Kenite, we find out later, he has a wife named Jael. They belong to the Kenites who were at peace with Israel, though they were not Israelites themselves.

And I mentioned before that one of the themes coursing through this whole story is that God uses faithful women to stand in the gap left by weak and sinful men. And we see it featured here again with Heber and Jael.

Again, the Kenites aren't Israelites, but they're at peace with the Israelites. And the fact that Heber has left the Kenite people indicates that he's chosen to reject Israel and their God, and he's now made peace with the enemy.

He's made peace with Jabin, king of Canaan. But isn't it interesting how God sovereignly directs every step, even of the unbeliever, and He puts Heber and Jael exactly where He wanted them for this moment to unfold.

[48 : 15] Now let's think about Jael for just a second before we get to the end. I remember when Julie and I got married almost 15 years ago now. She had grown up in Raleigh her whole life, and that's all she knew.

That's where her family was. That's where her friends were. That's her whole life was in Raleigh. And I remember moving to Charlotte was something she was excited about and willing to do, but it wasn't an easy transition either because she's leaving something that she's known her whole life, and it's only two hours away, but that was still a difficult thing for her to have to go through.

Many of you know what that's like. Now, I wonder if there was ever a moment where Jael was really complaining pretty hard about Heber, ripping her from her home and her family and her friends, taking her all the way up north where she may not even see him again, and now he's made peace with these people that she knows to be enemies of God and enemies of Israel.

I wonder if she ever complained about that. I wonder how many times she laid in her bed and asked God, why are you doing this to me? Why are you doing this to me?

Why are you turning my life upside down? She could have never known that God was working to use her in a way that would eventually lead her to be called, in chapter five, the most blessed of women.

[49 : 39] The lesson for Jael is the same as it is for Barak. Trust and obey. Remember, God doesn't deal in explanations. He deals in promises.

That's a word for us to hear today. How many nights are you laying in bed thinking, God, why have you done this to me? Why is my life turned upside down?

Trust and obey. Trust and obey. Let's get to what she actually does, how God uses her. Look with me at verse 17. 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. 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'm thirsty. So she opened a skin of milk instead and gave him a drink and covered him.

[50 : 41] 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 into the ground while he was lying fast asleep from weariness. So he died.

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

So he went into her tent and there lay Sisera dead with the tent peg in his temple. Isn't it amazing to see how God works all things for his glory and for the good of his people?

Here's Heber and Jael. They seem to have nothing at all to do with this whole scenario. God perhaps turns their lives upside down and moves them up north.

[51 : 45] Now there's a completely different life that they're living and maybe Jael's wondering, Why is this even happening to me? And it's all for this moment. And what is this moment about? Salvation.

God is working to deliver his people. God used the peace between Heber and Jabin to comfort Sisera and he used Jael's meekness to completely disarm him.

Then he gave Jael the courage and sensibility to lull Sisera asleep and deliver the deadly blow to his head. And Deborah rejoices in this in chapter 5, verse 24.

Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, of tent dwelling women, most blessed. He asked for water, where she gave him milk. She brought him curds in a noble's bowl.

She sent her hand to the tent peg, her right hand to the workman's mallet. She struck Sisera. She crushed his head. She shattered and pierced his temple. Between her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still.

[52 : 48] Between her feet he sank, he fell. Where he sank, there he fell. I guess the author really needed to get that across. Dead is the final word. Dead he lies.

Dead is the final word. It's an amazing story, isn't it? We're reminded here that God was not only defeating Israel's enemy, he was teaching Barak and us a lesson.

It's no coincidence that Barak was the one pursuing Sisera when Jael met him on the way. The honor of killing Sisera could have belonged to him, but God gave Sisera into Jael's hand instead.

Now, Barak wouldn't have walked away from that tent discouraged. I'm convinced of that. He might have felt the sting of the lesson. But I don't think Barak walks away from that tent discouraged.

I think he walks away from that tent with a renewed sense that what God says, God does. God has now delivered the entire army into my hand and he did exactly as he said he would.

[54 : 01] He's taken the honor of killing Sisera away from me and he's given it to Jael. I think Barak gets the lesson. What God says he does, an invaluable lesson for Israel, an invaluable lesson for us.

What he says in judgment, he does. So have ears to hear what he does in promise, says in promise, he accomplishes. Sometimes in unexpected ways, often in ways that we would never anticipate, but he always does what he says.

Both accounts of the story conclude by fixing our eyes on God who delivers his people. Verse 23 of chapter 4, So on that day, God subdued Jabin, the king of Canaan, before the people of Israel.

Verse 31 of Judges 5, So may all your enemies perish, O Lord, but your friends be like the sun as he rises in his mind. God went before Israel on Mount Tabor.

He went before Barak to Jael's tent. He's gone before us in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He's the God of salvation.

[55 : 17] No enemy stands a chance against him. Even sin and death. As Paul says, what shall we say then to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all. How will he not also give us graciously all things? He's also a God of promises, not explanations.

What he says, he does. Our job, trust, and obey. Through unknown paths, through shadows, our hearts fear not tomorrow.

For every step, his faithfulness is the truth that lights our way. Thank you.