

# JUDGES Ruler and Rescuer

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[ 0 : 00 ] Human beings have a timeless and universal fascination with superheroes. They've been the stuff of every culture from time immemorial.

From Gilgamesh, the ancient Sumerian king, whose epic search for immortality is perhaps the oldest written story on earth.

To Achilles, the great hero of the Trojan Wars. To the warriors and nation founders of ancient and modern history. To Olympians of every age and nation.

To the supermen and the Wonder Woman and all the marvel characters. Whether they're supermen and women who are real or imaginary. Contemporary warfare, sports, entertainment.

They are with us everywhere. There's a particular fascination with them. As I mentioned there in terms of marvel characters at the moment. You know, popular movies. We cannot get enough of superheroes.

[ 1 : 00 ] We even have to manufacture our own through TV shows like Australian Idol. And what these superheroes tend to do for us is they release us from the boredom of our ordinary lives.

They excite us. They inspire us. They even scandal us with their falls from grace. They fascinate us. They give us relief by making our own faults and failings seem so small and excusable compared to their enormous ones.

And the Bible has its heroes too. We're introduced to three of them in this text in front of us. But in turn, each one of these heroes points us to a greater hero.

And in fact, the only true hero of the book of Judges. And that is God himself. And so, as I said at the beginning, we're exploring Judges 4 and 5 tonight.

These chapters are an awesome read. They are really interesting. But both chapters 4 and 5 describe the same events, but coming at it from different angles, if you like.

[ 2 : 10 ] Chapter 4, which is what I just read, looks at the events from the perspective of a historian. It's a narrative, a historical narrative. Chapter 5 describes the same events that we've just read, but from the perspective of the poet or the theologian.

So, there's three things that I want us to see. We're going to look at very briefly tonight. First of all, we're going to look at chapter 4 and be introduced to the ruler and the rescuers. Then in chapter 5, we're going to see who the true ruler rescuer is.

And then the third point is what it means to live by faith in this ruler rescuer. Okay, so chapter 4, let's have a quick squiz at that.

Get your Bibles open. At the beginning of chapter 4, we see the cycle that we were introduced to last week by Takeshi. It starts all over again, very simply.

Again, the Israelites need evil in the eyes of the Lord now that Ehud was dead. So, one judge is dead and again, God's people commit evil in the eyes of the Lord.

[ 3 : 20 ] And their sin leads them to be oppressed by Jabin, king of Canaan. Now, ironically, this king would not even exist had Israel obeyed God back in chapter 1, when he said, go in and take the promised land and destroy him.

This guy wouldn't even be there, but now he's oppressing God's people. And Jabin's main agent of oppression is this Sisera, his commander, his general.

We're told in verse 3 that Sisera has 900 chariots fitted with iron at his disposal. And these things are the smart bombs and the drones of their time.

This is military technology at its height. And we are told here that Sisera cruelly oppressed the Israelites for 20 years.

This is the worst oppression that they have yet to face. And at the end of chapter 5, we get a measure of this man and how he treated people.

[ 4 : 29 ] In chapter 5, verses 28 and 29, Deborah, who will be introduced into a moment, pictures Sisera's mother and his mother's ladies-in-waiting, looking out for him to return victorious from his battle with the Israelites.

And we learn from the discussion that they're having with each other while they're waiting for him to come back, that what Sisera likes to do is to steal women, rape them, and enslave them as his sex slaves.

And they assume that he's taking his time coming back from the battle with Israel because he's in the process of taking more sex slaves for himself.

He's in the business of raping women right now. That's why he's taking his time. It was so common knowledge, even his mother knows about it. Don't worry, he'll be home for dinner once he's done with the women.

He was a cruel oppressor. And so it says Israel again cried out to the Lord for help, and God raises up Deborah. Now, Deborah is different from the other judges.

[ 5 : 48 ] First of all, she's a woman. She's the only woman judge. And secondly, she's described as a prophet in verse 4. Not a judge, but as a prophet.

And as such, she preaches and teaches the word of God. And she does it in verse 6 when she says to Barak, the Lord, the God of Israel, commands you.

That's her speaking prophecy over Barak's life. Verses 4 and 5 says that she was leading Israel and holding court. That is, Deborah was not a military leader.

She was more like a modern-day judicial official. Verse 5 says the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided.

Kind of like a Judge Judy kind of thing. She was recognized as a wise counselor, as a judge. I'm not making that comparison with Judge Judy, by the way. People came to her to settle all sorts of social and legal and relational cases.

[ 6 : 55 ] Deborah led the people of Israel from wisdom and for character rather than just pure military might. She was also, interesting, the only judge who led beyond the battlefield.

She didn't just lead them to release them from the oppressor, but she led Israel as a nation from beyond the battlefield. She is the savior who rules.

She's more than just a rescuer. She's a ruler. In fact, they look to her to reshape society. And in that sense, Deborah is the one judge of all the judges who is the greatest pointer to the monarchy period, which comes straight after this book and which this book is leading to.

She is the greatest pointer to that. She's the greatest pointer also in this book to the long-awaited Christ. You see, the Christ of whom Isaiah 9 says, he will bear the government on his shoulders and he's called wonderful counselor, prince of peace, establishing and upholding his kingdom with justice and righteousness.

So right here in the heart of this book of battles and slayings, we see a, it's a subtle point, but it's a significant point.

[ 8 : 28 ] God's people don't just need a mighty rescuer. They don't just need a savior. They need a ruler. They need a king. This is something that Israel will get to the point where they cry out for, but it's also a significant point for us to grapple with now.

All of these judges ultimately find their fulfillment in the person of Jesus. He is the Christ who Isaiah is referring to. So what happens when the modern day person wants to treat Jesus as rescuer but not ruler?

And there are people who want to do that. What happens when you treat Jesus just as your rescuer but not as your ruler, just as your savior but not your king?

The result is liberalism. It's called cheap grace. It's license. That is, the gospel of salvation in Jesus is just purely about the management of my sin.

It's about dealing with my sin. It's not about anything else. Just sin. The gospel is about having my sins forgiven so that I can go to heaven. It's not about relationship with God. It's just primarily my sins forgiven so that I get to go to heaven.

[ 9 : 45 ] So I don't get to suffer consequences for my sin. And so the thinking is, providing I've asked Jesus to forgive me, I've asked him into my heart and he's forgiven me. I get to go to heaven. It doesn't really matter how I live because he's in the business of forgiving me.

So he's going to do that. I've got this get out of jail free or get out of hell free card. And I don't need to do anything about spiritual disciplines or radical generosity or anything like that.

Because Jesus is my savior. On the other hand, if we treat Jesus as my lord, my ruler, and not my savior and my rescuer, the result is the opposite.

It's legalism. It's a life obeying the rules. Obeying the rules. Not totally confident whether I've actually got out of jail for free at all because I'm not sure where I stand.

I just hope I've done enough. And if I think, convince myself that I have done enough, then the result is self-righteousness and pride and arrogance and judgmentalism and a religious spirit upon everyone else who does not live up to my standard.

[10:58] And you can sit on this side and use all the language of Zion. You can lose all the language of righteousness. And you'll not have a life or a heart of righteousness.

Jesus must be both liberator and lord. He must be rescuer and ruler. What's interesting in this text is that Deborah is not the one who, in God's strength, rescues Israel by defeating its oppressor. She's the ruler, but we have two other rescuers here. And so she sends Barak in chapter 4, verse 6. He will lead the battle against God's enemies.

And Barak's name means lightning. I mean, that's awesome, isn't it? That's the guy you want to pick. The guy with the name lightning or crusher or something like that.

So here we have Captain Lightning. He's the hero of the story. Although he doesn't seem to fit when you read verse 8. Barak said to Deborah, if you go with me, I will go.

[12:17] But if you don't go with me, I won't go. So maybe Captain Lightning's not quite appropriate. Captain Sissy Pants or something like that might be more appropriate for him. He refuses to go into battle unless Deborah comes with him.

Now, he appears at this point to have a timid lack of faith. And maybe there is an element of wavering there for him.

But he seems to simply refuse to trust and obey the word that came from God. And in fact, when you read verse 9, it appears to confirm that conclusion.

Deborah says to him, Barak then summons the troops.

He prepares to fight. But only because Deborah is with him. And it's not until verse 14, after Sisera has gathered his awesome war machine down by the river and Deborah has told Barak to go, that Barak charges down Mount Tabor with his men.

[13:37] The honour for the victory is still withheld from Barak, however, because of his lack of obedient, radical faith in verse 8. That's the pessimistic way to read this text.

There is a number of commentators land on it that way. I think there is a more optimistic way to read it.

And it's my preference. And the Hebrew language defends it. And that is to read verse 9 like this.

On the expedition you are undertaking, the honour will not be yours.

Now with this reading, reading it that way, Deborah is not rebuking Barak for being weak, but simply telling him, you are about to charge down a hillside into the teeth of 900 iron chariots and you're not going to get the honour for it.

You okay with that? It's a prophetic statement of fact, not a critique of his faith.

[14:58] And there's a reason I read it like that when we get to Hebrews 11. This reading paints Barak as in fact a hero of faith.

He wants to take Deborah with him, not because he's a coward, not because he's unfaithful, but out of recognition that Deborah is the leader of God's people and she leads through wisdom by speaking the word of God.

The command from Deborah to Barak came from God and he wants to make sure that he's got the word of God with him right there, right then to go when he's told to go.

He wants to make sure that he's got a godly woman there who speaks the word of God. And we see that in verse 14.

As soon as Deborah tells Barak to attack, he does it immediately. He displays tremendous faith. But more importantly, he displays real faith in obeying the word of God at that moment.

[16:12] He wanted Deborah there so he could hear from God. And what makes this story so incredible is that Barak charges down this hillside into the battle against all odds, knowing that he ain't going to get the glory for it.

He's been told that in advance. You ain't going to get the glory for this. There is no Victoria Cross for you. There's no Congressional Medal of Honor. You're not going to be knighted. You're not going to be promoted to General Lightning.

It's not happening. No glory for you. Would you do that? I mean, how many of us even live the Christian life without the applause of other people?

It's so much easier to serve and to give and to sacrifice when other people are noticing. And it's so embarrassing when we've got to point it out to them in subtle ways. He obeys God and leads his men knowing that the victory will be given to another.

And when it's all over, it's done and dusted, Barak goes back to his job and Deborah will still rule. This is humility on display.

[ 17 : 34 ] And in his humble faith, Barak, the deliverer of Israel, really does point us to the great deliverer, who, though in very nature God, and therefore the rightful ruler of all things, still did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, something to be used for his own purpose, for a display of his own glory, but made himself nothing, humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.

And so Barak descends the mountain, Sisera flees, all that needs to happen now is for Barak to catch up with him and to claim victory, and by the time he does, Sisera will be dead.

There is this deliciously inexplicable break in the narrative of Barak's victory over Sisera in verse 11. The battle's about to happen, and then all of a sudden, the writer mentions that Heber, the Kenite, had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother, and Pishni's tent by the great tree of Zanonim near Kadesh.

Who cares about his camping trip? What's that there for? You read the narrative and you go, why do we care about this guy? Heber, he's on holidays.

He's pitched his tent. You wonder, what's it there for? It's like cutting for a commercial break right when they're about to announce the winner of Australian Idol or Bachelorette or whatever the shows are that you watch nowadays.

[ 19 : 19 ] I don't. That's a judgment there I'm just making. But Heber's wife is integral in this story.

That's why the little pitch in the tent thing there gets in the way. She's integral. Her name is Jael. And in verse 17, we are told that the fleeing Sisera reaches this tent which has been pitched, the tent of Jael and her name means safety.

What a name. How ironic. Safety. And Jael welcomes him in, gives him a drink, lets him take a nap. Then we read in verse 21, Jael, Heber's wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep because he's exhausted and she drove the tent peg through his temple into the ground and he died.

I'm pretty sure that little bit and he died is superfluous to the whole, you don't need to add that. I'm just assuming he's dead. You know, just want to make sure he died.

You know, he's dead. This is humiliating death for Sisera the great general because setting up and taking down tents in their culture was considered the work of women.

[ 20 : 54 ] Now, when I go camping, I do it because I like doing it and that doesn't do it. Just want to make that clear, I do it, right? Not now. In their culture, it was considered women's work and the tent peg, which is not the little things you get from BCF.

This is like, boom, tent peg. This is household appliances for a woman. So for Sisera, this is death by toaster is what this is.

Death by, or North Shore version, Thermomix. Death by Thermomix for Sisera, right? This is a smashing salvation. Pardon the pun.

I'm on a roll. So this is humiliating. This is a humiliating death for this guy.

But these verses do raise a dilemma for us. You know, how does bang, bang, bang through a bloke's head square with Jesus in Luke 6 when he says, love your enemies?

[ 22 : 00 ] How do you know? Did she not wear her what would Jesus do ban that day? Like, how do you square that? Driving a tent peg through a temple seems at odd with that.

Command to love, bless, pray for your enemies. Now, sometimes when the Bible has stories like this, we resolve the dilemma by remembering that we need to make a distinction between what the Bible reports and what it supports.

What it reports and what it supports. For instance, David had many wives. Report. It doesn't support us having many wives.

And so one thing it reports and over here it supports and celebrates. The problem for us in this instance is that Jael's actions are celebrated in chapter 5.

And so what her actions are doing in all the gruesomeness of it, they are celebrating the salvation of God's people through a horrible and humiliating death.

[ 23 : 19 ] That's what's happening. God's triumph over evil and the fact that one day all people will stand before him and be held accountable for their actions are in fact aspects of the gospel message which we should welcome and we should rejoice over.

As hard as it is, as difficult as it is for us to grapple with and the consequences of what that means, we should welcome and we should rejoice over. However, the Christian should tremble as they do so knowing that they will stand there too with Jesus alone as their advocate.

And Jesus is their advocate because he's the one who allowed tent pegs to be driven into his hands and his feet for our salvation.

His gruesome and humiliating death was for our freedom, for our salvation. Revelation chapter 11 verses 15 to 18 is quite clear that Jesus should be praised for his victory over sin and Satan and for his final and eternal judgment and crushing of all his enemies.

It says, all the heavens will declare the praiseworthiness of this Jesus who defeats all of his enemies forever. and we can know for sure that God will bring justice because we have seen sin rightly judged at the cross.

[ 24 : 54 ] The cross of Christ is not only the place where we are made right with God, it is the proof that God does in fact judge and punish sin.

The resurrection tells us that there will be a future judgment as well for those whose sin has not been punished by the Lord Jesus with his death.

That is, for those who decide to carry their sin themselves rather than hand it to Jesus. Acts 17 31 says that the resurrection is proof that Jesus will judge and he will punish sin forever.

Having said that, the death and resurrection of Jesus fundamentally does change our attitude towards our enemies. It is absolutely right that we want to see justice done.

Absolutely right. And frankly, if you're a Christian, you plead for that. You plead to God to bring justice to this world.

[ 26 : 07 ] You pray for him for the oppressed in this world to be released. For those who are suffering in the face of injustice around this world right now, for God to intervene and to bring justice.

You plead for God for that to happen. For those enslaved to be set free. But you plead for it knowing that it will be done.

but not by us. Not by us. The coming judgment sets us free from seeking justice done in this life at our hand.

There will be vindication of those who are active rightly and punishment for all wrongdoing beyond this life. We can yearn for justice and we should yearn for justice while at the same time still pray for and bless our enemies.

Because of the cross we can have the attitude of Jesus who on the cross as he looked at those who were nailing him down killing him said father forgive them.

[ 27 : 24 ] The cross enables us to do that with our enemies. As you move into chapter 5 we see who the true ruler and rescuer is.

Sisera's death is the most devastating humiliating defeat possible. It is at the hand of a woman in their culture devastating and humiliating.

And Deborah's prophecy back in verse 9 of chapter 4 was true. The honour was not Barak's but it wasn't Deborah's either. Humanly speaking the honour was if you like shared amongst three people.

And yet when you move into chapter 5 we notice that the honour goes to no human at all. Chapter 5 what it does is it looks beneath the surface of the events of chapter 4 and reveals the gods behind everything anyway.

God receives the praise for the victory here as Deborah and Barak sing the praises of God who's defeated their enemy.

[ 28 : 39 ] God will sing.

When we got these words up here one of the glorious things we get to do in corporal worship is sing the praises of God to lift up our voices and our hearts and declare that he is worthy.

Sing. The younger generation have to hear us sing. That's what Deborah and Barak are doing here in chapter 5.

It is just singing because of the victory that's been won. It says here as Israel's men were on a march, God was on the march. God showed his power through the rain in verse 4 as his people advanced down the mountain, the one for whom all mountains shake and tremble, goes to war in verse 5.

The point of verses 6 and 8 is that he is the only true God. Israel fell under oppression because they abandoned God and they served idols and because of that all of their society fell into decay.

[ 29 : 59 ] Deborah was their hope as the restorer of the society but verses 10 to 12 revealed that it was actually God's actions that gave them hope.

Then in verses 19 to 22 Deborah and Barak return and confirm again that this was God's victory. The God who rules nature, even the stars, was fighting for them verse 21 reveals how Sisera's mighty chariots were defeated in the end.

The God who made the clouds pour down water in verse 4 caused the river to flood sweeping away the chariots of Sisera as Barak advanced.

Sisera's not an idiot. He would never have arranged his chariots for battle next to a river if he was expecting it to rain.

And this is the dry season when this happened. But God in verse 6 through Deborah told Israel exactly where to fight and exactly when to fight.

[ 31 : 18 ] God brought the rain and God brought the rain and God the lesson for God's people here is that he wins and so blessing is found in and with him.

Blessing comes when we put ourselves in his service whatever the odds, whatever the likely cost it is for us. On the other hand according to verse 23 there is a curse for those who do exactly the opposite and those who stay at home.

It is not that God needs our help but that he allows us to be involved in his victory. Even Jael here despite being a Kenite and an enemy of God took her place in the story and killed the enemy of God.

It's an incredible narrative. And it's just so wonderful and ironic and beautiful how the narrative of these chapters are framed around the actions of two women.

Deborah leads Israel against Sisera's oppression seen most horribly the way he treats women and then Jael is the means by which his reign of rape and terror come to an end.

[ 32 : 43 ] two women bring him down. However, neither of them are mentioned in the Bible again.

Neither of them. Judges 4 tends to play down the hero status of Barak.

Barak. On the other hand, Samuel, the great prophet of Israel, mentions Barak in his farewell address to the nation of Israel in 1 Samuel chapter 12 and he's described there as a deliverer of Israel.

And Barak is also mentioned as one of the greats of the faith in Hebrews 11 32 to 34 where it says, and what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephtha, about David and Samuel and the prophets who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice and gained what was promised, who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames and escaped the edge of the sword, whose weakness was turned to strength and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.

Barak did what he did according to verse 33 of Hebrews 11 through faith. When the command from God came to go via Deborah, he didn't hesitate.

[ 34 : 24 ] Down the mountain he went with 10,000 men following him. It was inspirational leadership. An iron chariot could cut through a foot soldier like a hot knife through butter.

And 900 chariots would defeat 10,000 foot soldiers in open plain every day of the week. And the biggest challenge for Barak came when he hit the valley floor at the bottom of the mountain.

When he hit the bottom of the mountain, it was at that point he had to break cover and he had to advance for 20 kilometers across open ground before he hit the river Kishon and to front Sisera's formidable chariots in open country.

Sisera had plenty of time to marshal. They would have been destroyed before they even got to the river. That took nerves of steel.

And most of all, it took faith. An unwavering trust in the God who had promised them today's the day going to be victory. You go now and you get victory. Barak's forces were no match for Sisera's chariots, but Sisera's chariots were no match for God.

[ 35 : 54 ] This is Barak at his best, the man of faith, the faith that acts, the faith that stakes everything on God. And that's why Barak is mentioned in Hebrews 11.

He did not grab victory because of his training, because of his strategy, because of his raw strength. His victory was a gift. Now this guy is by no means the greatest of biblical heroes. Even Hebrews 11 gives way much more time and space to Abraham and Moses. This man was no superhero. Among human beings, there is only one whose faith in God was perfect. And Hebrews 12, verse 2, calls us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and the perfecter of our faith.

faith. That is, Jesus is the perfect example of faith. He is the one who had complete confidence in the word of God. Complete confidence that his death via the cross would result in victory.

[ 37 : 11 ] This confidence translated into actions. It says he endured the cross. And further, his faith was based on what lay ahead. For the joy set before him, he endured the cross.

Jesus is the perfect example of faith. He is the author of faith. That simply means that Jesus is the one who wrote the script on what it means to be a person of faith in the word of God.

Or what it means to live a life of dependence and obedience. He is also the perfecter of our faith.

Because he knew that you and I and Barak and Deborah could not do it.

He needed to fulfill it for us. And so he perfected it for us. Totally obeyed his father even to death, even death on a cross.

And so Hebrews tells us you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. You keep your eyes fixed on him. We are called to look to him for our hope.

[ 38 : 21 ] Verse 3 says, consider him who endured such opposition from sinners so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. What was the problem of the people of Israel in the time of judges?

They consistently grew weary, they consistently lost heart, they consistently gave themselves over to the worship of idols. And this passage says, you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus so that you don't do that.

He is the one who motivates us, who inspires us, he's the one who can help us to overcome our weariness and our half-heartedness and our worship of idols.

The main point of Hebrews 12, and I would argue that it's possibly the application for the entire book of Hebrews is in verse 1 of chapter 12, and it's one three-letter word right there, and it's the word run.

That's the application, in my view, of all of Hebrews. You fix your eyes on Jesus and you run the race of perseverance. I think that everything else supports it, explains it, gives motivation for it.

[ 39 : 36 ] Run the race of faith in Jesus. Run the race of set before you. Endure, persevere, run, fight, be alert, be strengthened, don't drift, don't neglect, don't be sluggish, don't stroll, don't meander, don't wander aimlessly, don't take your eternal security for granted.

Run the race of perseverance. Don't wander around half-hearted, flying over here, worshipping this idol and worshipping this idol of the heart.

It says he makes it really clearly. Fix your eyes on Jesus, run the race and get rid of the sin that trips you up. Deal with your idols is what it says. Deal with the idols of the heart and not just the idols of your heart which are clearly sin, it says get rid of everything that will slow you down.

Don't ask of your entertainment, don't ask of your downtime, don't ask of your work, don't ask of, is it sin? Ask the question, is this going to slow me?

Is it going to hold me back? Is it going to put Jesus in a second place in any way? Don't ask, is it sin? Ask, is it going to slow me from running the race of perseverance of obedience to Christ?

[ 40 : 56 ] This passage is saying risk everything for Christ. if there's one thing that I want to do in my time at St. Paul's and have been trying to do with us at St. Paul's is to build a church culture that risks everything for the glory of God.

We will stop doing things and we will start doing things and we will consistently call for sacrifice. Because Jesus is the author and the perfecter of our faith.

So what about you? What's he calling you to? It's, you know, I mean, let's put this in perspective. He's not asking you to run down a hill into chariots when he's saying take the risk and join a community group.

Is he? Take the risk of relationship with people and join a community group. He's not asking you to charge at 900 iron chariots when he says, you know, come to church every week and encourage your brothers and sisters and sing my glorious name.

That's not a, but it's a risk, isn't it? When he's calling you to be radically generous, he's not asking you to run down a hill into 900 chariots. He's asking you to bring a friend to Christ when he's asking you to surrender the idols.

[ 42 : 18 ] He's not asking you to run down at 900 chariots, but he is calling you to risk. Are you hearing him? Are you obeying him?

Run as if you are in a race with a finishing line and everything is hanging on that finish line. Everything. Fight the fight of faith on the basis of Christ's spectacular death and resurrection and show your faith the way the Barak, Deborah, Jael, and the saints of Hebrews 11 did, not by coasting through life, but by doing what God called them to do and doing it immediately, even at great personal cost.

Thank you. Thank you.