

Deborah instructs the Church

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[0 : 00] Well, next we're going to have our Bible reading, and we're continuing in our series in the book of Judges. So perhaps you turn with me to Judges chapter 5, and you'll find this on page 203, page 203.

Now, this chapter is very much to be taken with chapter 4, and some of you will have been here a couple of weeks ago in the evening when we were studying chapter 4.

But this is the follow-up to it, and this is the song which Deborah, the judge and prophetess, sang and Barak, the son of Abinuum, after their great victory over Sisera and Jabin, the king of Canaan.

So Judges chapter 5, and I'm reading now the whole chapter. Then sang Deborah and Barak, the son of Abinuum, on that day, that the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly, bless the Lord.

Hear, O kings, give ear, O princes, to the Lord I will sing. I will make melody to the Lord, the God of Israel. Lord, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens dropped.

[1 : 28] Yes, the clouds dropped water. The mountains quaked before the Lord, even Sinai before the Lord, the God of Israel. In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were abandoned and travelers kept to the byways.

The villagers ceased in Israel. They ceased to be until I arose. I, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel. When new gods were chosen, then war was in the gates.

Was shield or spear to be seen among 40,000 in Israel? My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel, who offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless the Lord.

Tell of it, you who ride on white donkeys, you who sit on rich carpets, and you who walk by the way. To the sound of musicians at the watering places, there they repeat the righteous triumphs of the Lord, the righteous triumphs of his villagers in Israel.

Then down to the gates marched the people of the Lord. Awake, awake, Deborah. Awake, awake. Break out in a song. Arise, Barak. Lead away your captives, O son of Abinoam.

[2 : 39] Then down marched the remnant of the noble. The people of the Lord marched down for me against the mighty. From Ephraim, their root, they marched down into the valley, following you, Benjamin, with your kinsmen.

From Machia marched down the commanders. And from Zebulun, those who bear the lieutenant's staff. The princes of Issachar came with Deborah. And Issachar, faithful to Barak, into the valley, they rushed at his heels.

Among the clans of Reuben, there were great searchings of heart. Why did you sit still among the sheepfolds to hear the whistling for the flocks?

Among the clans of Reuben, there were great searchings of heart. Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan. And Dan, why did he stay with the ships? Asher sat still at the coast of the sea, staying by his landings.

Zebulun is a people who risked their lives to the death. Naphtali, too, on the heights of the field. The kings came. They fought. Then fought the kings of Canaan at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo.

[3 : 47] 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, with might. Then loud beat the horse's hoofs with the galloping, galloping of his steeds. Curse Meroz, says the angel of the Lord.

Curse its inhabitants thoroughly. Because they did not come to the help of the Lord. To the help of the Lord against the mighty. Most blessed of women be Jael.

The wife of Heber, the Kenite. Of tent-dwelling women most blessed. He, that is Sisera, he asked water and she gave him milk. She brought him curds in a noble's bowl.

She sent her hand to the tent peg and her right hand to the workman's mallet. She struck Sisera. She crushed his head. She shattered and pierced his temple.

[4 : 46] Between her feet he sank. He fell. He lay still. Between her feet he sank. He fell. Where he sank, there he fell. Dead.

Out of the window she peered. The mother of Sisera wailed 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? A womb or two, a girl or two for every man? Spoil of dyed materials for Sisera?

Spoil of dyed materials embroidered? Two pieces of dyed work embroidered for the neck as spoil? So may all your enemies perish, O Lord.

But your friends be like the sun as he rises in his might. And the land had rest for forty years. Amen.

[5 : 47] The word of the Lord. And may it be a blessing to us today. Well let's again turn to the book of Judges chapter five.

Pages two hundred and three and two hundred and four. Most of it on page two oh four in our hardback Bibles. Now I did at first choose as a title for this passage or for my sermon.

A song of victory. But that's possibly a rather weak title. How about a better one like this? Deborah instructs the church. Deborah instructs the church. Because in effect that is what Deborah is doing here.

This song that she and Barak composed after the Lord had defeated their Canaanite enemies has been included here in the Bible for our instruction. Everything in the Bible is for our instruction.

So although we live some three thousand three hundred years after these events, these words are still here and they still have all their original vitality. They're here for us to study.

[7 : 06] Perhaps even for us to sing. Now that would be a challenge for one of our musical people, wouldn't it? To turn Judges five into a kind of oratorio. Perhaps we should ask Willie Philip to do that. No, maybe not.

Maybe not. Anyway, somebody. Well let me briefly introduce this chapter. Two weeks ago, as I mentioned earlier, we were studying chapter four. And chapter four tells the story of a great military victory.

Jabin, the king of the Canaanites, and his general Sisera, who commands nine hundred chariots of iron, have been cruelly oppressing the Israelites for the last 20 years.

And the Israelites eventually cry to the Lord for help, and he sends it in the form of Deborah. Now Deborah was distinguished among the judges, I think, for two things principally.

First of all, because she was the only woman judge. And secondly, because she was a prophetess. And the men judges are not called prophets. But through her command, the Lord commissions Barak of the tribe of Naphtali to raise an army and to take on Sisera and his nine hundred chariots.

[8 : 10] And as verse 15 puts it in chapter four, chapter four, verse 15, the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword.

You'll remember that General Sisera himself manages to flee the battle on foot. He goes to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, and he takes refuge there with her.

And she bravely puts him to death with the skillful use of hammer and tent peg. So as verse 23 puts it, this is chapter four again, verse 23 puts it, on that day God subdued Jabin, the king of Canaan.

And finally, as verse 24 puts it, he was destroyed. So it was a great victory for the Lord. And chapter five celebrates that victory and tells us quite a bit of interesting detail about the battle, which we don't learn in chapter four.

So in fact, the two chapters need to be read together because chapter five gives us a fuller picture of this battle of the Kishon Valley. Now, friends, let me at this point raise an interesting and tricky question before we get into the text properly.

[9 : 25] You may already have this question in your mind before I even articulate it. And the question is this. Here we have in Judges chapter five, a celebration of victory over Israel's enemies.

And there's a fierce sense of rejoicing at their downfall. But, and here's the question, didn't Jesus say to us, love your enemies, love them, and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven?

In other words, so that you may be like your father who is in heaven. So if Deborah is indeed an instructor of the church, is her instruction not in some way contradicting the instruction of the Lord Jesus?

Now, that's an important question and we mustn't shirk it. So let's ask first, how did the Lord Jesus, how did he practice what he preached?

How did he put into practice loving his enemies? How did he express love for them? Well, the answer is he taught them, he instructed them in the truth about God. And he painstakingly and patiently told them stories and parables to illustrate and to clarify the truth of the gospel.

[10 : 33] But having done that and taken time over that, he had to say finally to those who refused to accept his message, woe to you, you serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?

And then he wept over Jerusalem because so many of its people hardened their hearts against him. So his love for his enemies was expressed in patient instruction in the gospel.

But he knew and he taught that those who refused him would be judged and condemned in the end. I think of the apostle Paul, who several times in his letters says that he follows in the footsteps of Christ.

How did he do this? Well, he taught just what Jesus taught. Romans 12, bless those who persecute you. Bless them and do not curse them. So it was the same message.

So how did Paul, in his experience, practice the blessing of his persecutors? Well, his method, again, was just like that of Jesus. He taught them. And the Acts of the Apostles shows Paul, in many different cities, reasoning with hostile audiences and trying to persuade them of the truth about Jesus.

[11 : 43] But if, after patient instruction, they refused to accept the gospel, Paul had to say to them, your blood be upon your own heads. In other words, you must take responsibility for your own hardness of heart.

And when God finally rejects you, you can blame no one but yourselves for your final ruin. Now, you and I today are called to follow the example of the Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul.

So this would mean, let me instance an example. If some militant atheist professor from Oxford University should happen to knock on your door one afternoon, an unlikely scenario, you might say, but just imagine that happened.

What do you do? You don't open your cupboard and take out a hammer and a tent peg. No. You say, come in, professor. I'll put the kettle on. Sit down and have a cup of tea.

And having done that, you then engage with him in debate about the gospel. You try, like Jesus and Paul, to persuade him of the truth about Christ. And if he should be convinced by the gospel, he becomes your brother.

[12 : 48] Now, miracles of that kind have happened. But if he should continue to harden his heart against Christ, you have to tell him that he is heading for judgment and ruin.

And you have to let him go sorrowfully. You'll pray for him, of course, that he may yet turn to Christ and find forgiveness. Now, you may say, that's the Christianity of the New Testament.

And I'm very glad to follow that. But here in Judges 4 and 5, it seems so different. Because Deborah and Barak and Jael didn't try to evangelize the Canaanites.

They cut them to pieces. Now, the way to understand it is surely like this. These Canaanites, Sisera and his men, they were beyond hope. They were in the same position before God as the Pharisees were, who had heard the gospel from the lips of Jesus and had then rejected it.

It wasn't as though these Canaanites had had no access to the true knowledge of God. Think of Romans chapter 1, where Paul explains that all the Gentiles of old had had access to the knowledge of God through looking at the creation outside them, the obvious signs of God's handiwork and power, and also looking at their consciences inside them.

[14 : 03] But, says Paul in Romans 1, they suppressed the truth about God. They said, we don't want to know him. And they turned instead to idols. And that led to God giving them over to a lifestyle of increasing violence, hatred, and perversion.

And in giving them over to a lifestyle of that kind, God was expressing his anger against them, an anger that would come to its final and fullest expression on the day of judgment.

Now, these people here in Judges 4 and 5, these Canaanites, again to use Paul's phrase in Romans 1, were without excuse. They had had their opportunity, but they'd not taken it.

And now they were reaping the harvest of their idolatrous and perverse lifestyle. So the destruction that they endured at the hands of Barak and Jael was just and fully deserved.

And we're to read this as a foretaste of the much greater and more awesome destruction of his enemies that God will finally bring about on the day of judgment. So, friends, we must not shrink from acknowledging and endorsing and welcoming God's final judgment on all his enemies at the end, because this is divine justice.

[15 : 22] For God not to behave like this would be for God to behave immorally. Think of the book of Revelation right at the end, when God reveals his final judgments, which are very severe, and the cry goes up, Yes, Lord God, the Almighty, true and just are your judgments.

God's judgments are mighty and fearsome, but they are just and they're justified. And the judgment against Sisera and these Canaanites is just one in a chain of many righteous judgments which are recorded for us in the Bible.

Now, friends, I hope that gives us some kind of a framework for understanding how the Song of Judges 5 is not in the least bit inconsistent with the faith of the Bible, with the faith of Jesus, and of Paul the Apostle, the whole of the New Testament.

It's all part of the same thing. So let's turn to this wonderful and very interesting chapter. Now, the Song here is built around three contrasts, and the contrasts are there to give us understanding.

In fact, the truth of the whole Bible comes to us in one contrast after another. That's the way truth is described and defined in the Bible. So, for example, God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

[16 : 42] We're justified by faith in Christ, not by works of the law. The works of the flesh are contrasted with the fruit of the Spirit. Good is contrasted with evil, truth with falsehood, honesty with deceit, salvation with condemnation.

Now, the Lord knows that our minds are simple and our understanding is often hazy. I certainly speak for myself. So he kindly gives us these contrasts so as to strengthen our grip on reality and our grasp on truth.

So here's our first contrast, and that is the contrast between the powerful and the powerless. That is between God who is powerful and God's people who are powerless.

Let's look first at the power of God as Deborah and Barak describe it in verses 4 and 5 of chapter 5. 4 and 5. Now, in those two verses, our songwriters, Deborah and Barak, are looking back a good couple of centuries or more to the time when the Lord God came to meet Moses and the people of Israel at Mount Sinai.

And you'll remember they'd just escaped at that stage from the clutches of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. They'd crossed the Red Sea and they'd come to the foot of Mount Sinai. And God's presence there was overwhelming and fearsome.

[18 : 20] Look at verse 4. The Lord marched and the very earth trembled. He's like a mighty warrior striding across the desert to meet his people and do business with them.

Verse 5. The mountains quaked before the Lord, even Sinai, even Sinai, which is no pimple. I looked it up on my atlas and discovered it's some 7,500 feet tall.

That's nearly twice the height of Ben Nevis. But Sinai, too, this great mountain, shivered as the Lord approached it. Now, Barak and Deborah here are basing their account on that original account that they would have known from Exodus chapter 19.

No need to turn it up, but let me quote you a verse or two from Exodus 19. There were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast so that all the people in the camp trembled.

Now, Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him in thunder.

[19 : 26] The Lord came down on Mount Sinai to the top of the mountain and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain. And Moses went up. Now, we can be sure that Deborah and Barak would have known that story from Exodus.

But why should they want to retell part of the Exodus story here in verses 4 and 5? Surely to make the point that the God who marched out to Sinai then to meet his people and help them was still today in their day rousing himself to fight for his people.

Some 200 years later. In other words, God had not hung up his marching boots after Sinai. Just look back to chapter 4, verse 23. On that day, God subdued Jabin, the king of Canaan, before the people of Israel.

That victory was his work. He was still powerful and active. Of course, the Lord will sometimes, in the Bible, use the forces of creation and nature to accomplish his purposes.

So, for example, he used the rain and the floods to deluge the world back in Genesis chapter 6. He used lightning and thunder and fire and smoke to show his majesty at Mount Sinai.

[20 : 43] And here, in Judges 5, he seems to have used torrential rain. Look on to verse 21. The torrent, Kishon, swept them.

That's the Canaanites. Swept them away. The ancient torrent, the torrent, Kishon, march on my soul with might. Now, apparently, this river, Kishon, or the Wadi Kishon, I think it's called, is normally a pretty insignificant little stream.

Not much to it at all. But verse 21 there, and possibly verse 4, if you look back to the heavens, the clouds dropping water, the suggestion there is that there'd been an enormous cloudburst, so much rain that the valley was swamped with a flash flood.

And this may well explain why Sisera's 900 chariots of iron became useless. A chariot of iron is no more use in deep water than your Vauxhall Astra is useful in deep water, is it?

And Deborah says as well, in verse 20, that the very stars in the heavens were fighting against Sisera. Now, she hasn't suddenly lost her wits and become astrological.

[21 : 48] There is no astrology in the Bible. There's never any sense that the stars exercise some power independent of their creator. What Deborah means there is that the whole weather system, the whole thing from the stars above to the torrential rains beneath, all of it was being managed by the Lord in such a way as to bring Sisera's army to defeat.

It's almost a rerun of the Egyptians' chariots becoming clogged and useless in the Red Sea as they rushed in after the Israelites, but were then overwhelmed by water.

So we have a powerful God, praised here by Deborah and Barak. The God of Sinai is the God of the river Kishon. And, of course, he's the God of any place on earth where helpless people turn to him and cry to be rescued, which includes Bath Street, Glasgow in 2014.

But God is contrasted with the helpless and powerless people of Israel in verses 6, 7, and 8. Just look at those verses, 6 to 8.

What was life in Israel like in the days of Shamgar and Jael and Deborah? Well, those verses are making the point that society had more or less fallen apart.

[23 : 05] So, verse 6, the highways or the main roads were abandoned because of thieves and thugs. Travelers had to use the little back roads if they were to get around.

Verse 7, the villagers ceased. Now, in better days, you could live in Israel in small unwalled villages. But with Sisera's people, these militias all over the place, the Israelites had to seek safety in walled towns.

Verse 8 mentions the gates. Now, the gates of towns and cities were the courts, in effect. They were the places where the elders gathered to settle disputes and administer justice.

But the gates were now frequented with enemy soldiers. And that means that local systems of justice had broken down. And look at that question there at the end of verse 8.

Was shield or spear to be seen among 40,000 in Israel? The answer is no. No. The Israelites were so much under Sisera's heel that they had no weapons. And what caused this sorry state of affairs?

[24 : 07] Verse 8 again. It was when new gods were chosen. Idolatrous gods. That's one of the great themes of the book of Judges. Just look back to chapter 2, verse 11, where it's spelt out as a kind of template form.

This is the theme that runs right the way through, 2, 11. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. That was their choosing of new gods. They abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who brought them out of Egypt.

And they went after other gods. So that was always the root of the problem. They abandoned the Lord. And the Lord gave them over into the power of an oppressor. So the contrast is this.

You have these desperate, powerless people whose social structures are falling apart. And you have them placed alongside the God of almighty power.

Now, does that contrast ring any bells in our own minds? If it does, let's be encouraged. We may sometimes feel today that the Church of Christ is very weak.

[25 : 11] Certainly, we'll feel that it's regarded by secular society as a vestige of something that was once significant but is no longer. Just a bit of interesting heritage and history.

An interesting museum piece, a bit like Stevenson's Rocket. Wonderful in its day, but well past its sell-by date. Now, the God of Sinai, the God of the Wadi Kishon, has not hung up his boots.

And if we look beyond Britain and around the world today, we can see the unmistakable power and progress of the gospel. And even here in secularized Britain, there are many bright lights that shine in the darkness.

So there's the first contrast, the powerful God and his powerless people. Now, the second contrast in this chapter is the contrast between the willing and the unwilling.

You may have noticed, as I read it earlier, some of the tribes of Israel are praised highly in Deborah's song because they were willing to join in the battle. But Deborah censures others of the tribes because they were unwilling to take the risks involved in the warfare.

[26 : 18] Just look at the way Deborah develops her song from verse 13. Down marched the remnant of the noble. The people of the Lord marched down.

Just notice that verb there, march down. It comes twice in verse 13 and twice again in verse 14. The idea is picked up again in verse 15 when Deborah says, Into the valley.

In other words, down into the valley. They rushed at Barak's heels. Now, it stems from the geography. And if you look back to chapter 4, verse 14, 414, you'll see that Barak, end of the verse, Barak went down from Mount Tabor, the slopes of Mount Tabor, with 10,000 men following him.

You have an advantage over the enemy in ancient warfare if you can rush down on him from a higher position. You have the momentum and the speed, don't you?

You can slice him up before he slices you up. If you've ever driven eastwards along the A71 from New Milnes in Ayrshire, you ever been down into those wild parts?

[27 : 25] Think of New Milnes in Ayrshire. Drive east along the A71 towards Straven. And about halfway between New Milnes and Straven, there's a sharp little hill on your left-hand side called Loudoun Hill.

You'll know that hill. It's not very tall, but it's got a very steep, rocky side. And apparently, William Wallace and his men, in about the year 1298, once achieved a great victory against the enemy, who I think were the English, by rushing down the hill at the enemy, carving them up.

They went down. So that's the point of marching down. So who marched down on Sisera's men? Here's where Deborah distinguishes the two groups. First of all, verse 14, the men of Ephraim, the tribe of Ephraim, they marched down following the men of Benjamin.

Then Machia. Now Machia was the son of Manasseh, who was the son of Joseph. So the men of Machia were of the half-tribe of Manasseh. Then we have praised the men of Zebulun and the princes of Issachar, presumably with their warriors behind them.

And the men of Naphtali, which I think was Barak's own tribe, they're commended further down in verse 18. These are the willing warriors, the ones who, in the words of verse 18, were willing to risk their lives to the death.

[28 : 40] But then our judge Deborah has some sharp words to say to the unwilling tribes, unwilling Israelites. Verse 15. Among the clans of Reuben, there were great searchings of heart.

Why did you sit still among the sheepfolds to hear the whistling for the flocks? Now you may remember from early Old Testament history that the people of the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the other half of the tribe of Manasseh, which is described in verse 17 as Gilead, these tribes had large flocks and herds.

And the grazing they discovered as they began to colonize the Promised Land, the grazing was particularly good on the east side of the River Jordan. So they asked Moses for special permission to remain on the east bank of the Jordan so that they could find satisfactory pasturage for their large flocks.

Now without going into all the details of the story, Moses allowed them to do that, as long as they were willing to bear arms and to help their brother tribes across the Jordan into Israel to settle in their lands west of the Jordan.

But that was a century or two ago. And the people of Reuben and Gilead in the time of Deborah are now very comfortably settled, thank you, to the east of the Jordan. So when this crisis, this military crisis, comes to the west of the Jordan and Barak summons the warriors of Israel, these east of the Jordan folk look at each other.

[30 : 09] And although in the words of verse 15, they search their hearts, they don't seem to search them deep enough to discover a will to engage in the Lord's warfare. In the words of verse 16, they sit still among their sheepfolds.

They seem to have been more concerned to hear their shepherds whistling for their flocks and protecting their material wealth than they were to fight with their brothers against the enemy. You can imagine a conversation.

One Reubenite says to another, Well, my brother, it was the Lord himself who gave us this wonderful pasture land as our possession for perpetuity. And look how he's blessed us. We have sheep as many as the stars in the sky.

Are we to forsake the inheritance that the Lord has given us through Moses and risk our necks for our tribes across the river that we hardly ever see? So Reuben and Gilead didn't budge.

They preferred their used milk and their roast lamb to the clash of battle. And what about the men of Dan and Asher in verse 17? Well, they lived further north up on the sea coast to the northwest along the Mediterranean coast.

[31 : 16] And they were obviously getting rich by trading. They didn't want to leave their ships and their landing jetties where the profitable trade came from overseas. So do you see the stark contrast?

It's a sharp contrast that Deborah is painting here. Some were willing to do battle in the Lord's cause and risk their lives to the death, as it's put in verse 17. Sorry, verse 18.

Risk their lives to the death. But others simply didn't want to stir themselves. They didn't want to risk their comfortable surroundings and their wealth. Now, friends, isn't this a challenge for us today to offer ourselves willingly to engage in the Lord's warfare?

And let me put it like this. In many churches, I don't say in this church necessarily, but in many churches, people will fall into two groups. There'll be those who are engaged in the struggle on the field of play, you might say, and then there are the spectators.

And when an individual moves from the comfort of the spectator's seat, where he sits with a blanket over his knees and a hip flask with something warming in it to keep his spirits up and a packet of sandwiches, when he leaves the spectator's seat and puts on his kit and runs onto the field, risking injury and the boos of the crowd, he moves, if you like, from the sheepfolds of Reuben to the heels of General Barak.

[32 : 42] I once heard a Christian preacher put it like this. The Christian life is spelt out in four letters. R-I-S-K. Look at verse 18 again.

Zebulun is a people who risked their lives to the death. Think of what Jesus said. It's the one who's willing to lose his life for my sake who finds it.

But the one who protects his life at all costs is the one who will lose it in the end. So Deborah here is instructing the church to be willing to lose its life for the sake of the Lord.

In fact, she begins her song with this very theme back in verse 2. Just look back at verse 2. That the leaders took the lead in Israel, that the people offered themselves willingly.

Bless the Lord. And she repeats just that same sentiment in verse 9. So these are the willing, the ones who are prepared to offer themselves and to risk their lives to the death.

[33 : 44] So if we today are willing to be soldiers for Christ on the field of battle, rather than comfortable spectators, we risk getting hurt. Warfare brings wounds.

Christians who battle for Christ risk losing reputations, money, social status. We certainly lose the applause of the world.

In some cases, there can be a risk to our health. But Jesus is our pattern. In the words of verse 18, he risked his life to the death. But God raised him and vindicated him.

That's the pattern. He was willing to endure wounds and contempt and crucifixion. And if we stick with him and follow him into battle, as the 21st century unfolds, we will find, friends, that we will be wounded and scarred and scorned.

But we're in the best company because we're in his company. The willing and the unwilling. We're now thirdly in verses 24 to 30.

[34 : 53] We have a contrast between the faithful and the faithless. There's Jael, the wife of Heba, whose faith and faithfulness to the true God was demonstrated by her brave deeds.

And then we have on the other side the mother of Sisera, whose trust in the idols of Canaan brings disaster to her and her people in the end. Now let's look at her first, the mother of Sisera, who is described in verses 28 to 30.

It's a delicious little piece of poetry, this. It's heavy with sarcasm. The old lady, General Sisera's mother, is pictured in her house surrounded by a bevy of young women who are described in verse 29 as princesses.

Now they might have been her daughters, not that she was a queen, but they could have been her daughters. They might have been Sisera's harem. But it's a scene of feminine anxiety with the young ones trying to calm the older woman.

And she peers out through the latticed window in the direction of where her son rode out that morning towards the battle. And she says, why is he so long delayed? Where's my big bold son dressed in all his armor?

[36 : 02] Why can't I hear the chariot wheels rumbling and the horses galloping? Could anything possibly have gone wrong? And her young women answer her in verse 29.

Indeed, the same answer suggests itself to her own mind. They say, obviously, ma'am, they've won the battle. I mean, we take that as a matter of course. And they're delayed now because they're dividing up the spoil as they always do.

A womb or two for every man. That's rape. That's the spoils of the victor. The victorious soldiers are rampaging through the Israelite villages, terrifying and raping the Israelite women.

And think, ma'am, of the lovely fabrics that they're going to bring back from the villages. Dyed materials, beautifully embroidered, pashminas and scarves to drape around Madam Sisera's neck.

It's self-deceiving, wishful thinking, concealing their real sense of terror and foreboding. Those who are against the people of the Lord will come to disaster in the end.

[37 : 04] But look now at Deborah's tribute to the faithful jail in verses 24 to 27. You'll see twice in verse 24, Deborah calls jail blessed, which means blessed by God or approved by God.

Now, I wonder if you're looking at these verses 24 to 27 and hoping very much that I'm not going to go through them blow by blow. You might be thinking, Edward, please don't go there.

It's nearly lunchtime. It's a horrible description and just looking at verses 26 and 27 makes me feel rather queasy. Now, friends, we mustn't pretend that verses 26 and 27 are not there.

Did Paul say to Timothy, Timothy, all scripture is inspired by God except, of course, Judges 5, 26 and 27 and is profitable for teaching? No, he did not.

These two verses, we know, are just as much inspired scripture as any other part of the Bible. Now, friends, it is the study of the Bible without avoiding the tricky parts that rearranges our thinking.

[38 : 12] and it's the continued study of the Bible that refashions our minds after the pattern of the mind of Jesus and so often it is the most difficult passages, the most forbidding passages in the Bible which teach us the most because they force us to look at issues in a different light.

It's these difficult passages that rearrange our thinking and prove to be a blessing to us. In these two verses, verses 26 and 27, Deborah is frankly delighting in the downfall of her enemy who is God's enemy.

It's ironic but it's appropriate that this horrible man who has spent years raping Israelite women as a pastime should in the end be defeated by two women Deborah and Jael.

Deborah is taking pleasure in rehearsing the details of the final crushing of the tyrant and in doing so she is preparing people like us to rejoice with the Lord in the final downfall of his enemies.

We've not been well served over the years by Christians who have said that God hates the sin but loves the sinner. That is altogether too simplistic a distinction.

[39 : 33] The Bible often teaches that God hates the sinner as well as the sin. Listen for example to King David in the Psalms. He says to God you hate all evil doers not simply all evil.

You hate all evil doers. You destroy those who speak lies. The Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man. And you find that kind of statement again and again in the Psalms.

The attitude of Jesus is just the same. He pronounces woe to the unrepentant and the hypocritical Pharisees the ones who will not come to him.

He says in John 3.36 that very famous verse he says that the wrath of God remains on those who refuse to obey the Son of God. In one of his parables the wicked servant who makes no use of the talent entrusted to him by his master eventually has to hear his master say cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness.

In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. We mustn't have a soft and sentimental view of the way the Lord will finally deal with those who have opposed him.

[40 : 43] He is wonderfully kind. He is wonderfully tender and fully forgiving and undeservedly gracious to those who turn to him in repentance and trust.

None of us deserves his mercy. But in the end when all possibility of repentance is gone he will not spare those who have opposed him. The gruesome death of Sisera is a foretaste of the final destruction of God's enemies and Jael is praised by the prophetess whose song expresses God's view God's analysis of the battle of the river Kishon.

We must allow scripture to recast our thinking and to drive the sentimentality out of us. God is serious about the ultimate putting down of his enemies.

Justice will be done and Sisera's death is a foretaste of the final judgment. Well let's turn finally to verse 31 which is a strong and fitting end to Deborah's song.

You'll see from verse 31 that we have here the grand canyon of a chasm that runs right the way through the Bible. And that chasm is the division between the enemies of the Lord and his friends.

[42 : 00] Now the first half of the verse is a prayer. So, which means in just the same way that Sisera was punished. So, may all your enemies perish, O Lord.

Now the meaning of that prayer is almost identical with the meaning of the prayer thy kingdom come. When we pray thy kingdom come we're asking for the Lord to return and establish his kingdom in all its fullness.

The establishing of his kingdom must entail the destruction of all his enemies. There can be no place for his enemies in the new creation. Then the second half of the verse is also a prayer and it's a longing that the friends of the Lord, in fact literally the word means those who love the Lord, that they may be like the sun rising in his might.

In other words, strengthened, glorious, and radiant. That is the destiny of those who love the Lord. Now here on earth, how brightly does our light shine?

I guess it's pretty dim most of the time. The Lord's friends here on earth are no more than the first rays of sunshine peeping over the horizon on a winter's dawn. But in the end, those who love the Lord will be like the sun rising in full strength and all its glory.

[43 : 22] So verse 31 divides the human race into two groups. There's no third group. We all belong to one or the other. In the end, our destiny will either be that of Sisera, justly crushed for opposition to the Lord.

It will either be that of Sisera or that of Barak and Jael and Deborah. And, says the writer finally, the land had rest for 40 years.

And that is a little glimpse in time of the rest and peace and joy of eternity. When everything and everyone that has opposed God will be destroyed and put down.

Let us pray together. Dear God, our Father, we pray that you will write these truths of the Bible deep in our hearts and help us to believe them deeply.

We pray that you will give us great love for those who are at the moment still able to hear the gospel. and we pray that you will give us the courage to tell them the good news about Jesus, the news that brought us from death to life so that they too can enjoy that wonderful change.

[44 : 52] So, dear Father, have mercy upon us, we pray, and help us to be like the sun increasingly rising and shining in its strength until that great day comes when all who belong to you will be around your throne in glory, praising you, loving you, and seeing your truth and the greatness of your salvation in a way that we cannot see it now.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.