

BARAK -- RELUCTANT HERO

Read Hebrews 11:32-34

Review your memory verses: Hebrews 11:1, Genesis 15:1, Hebrews 11:6, Genesis 50:20, Hebrews 11:25-26, and Joshua 1:9.

This series on People of Faith has also been a study of God at work in history. We've seen the formation of the nation Israel: hinted at in a promise to the first woman Eve, confirmed by a miracle birth to aged parents, gaining momentum in the growing families of 12 sons, becoming a multitude as aliens and slaves in Egypt, and reaching nation-hood in a mass escape from Pharaoh's domain to their own promised land under Moses and Joshua.

While God was nurturing this emerging nation, He was also extending His mercy to another people, the Canaanites (the "original owners" of the Promised Land). Remember that in love God brought His man Abram from far off Ur right into their midst, giving him great influence among them. This wasn't just to bless Abram. Through his presence, God was providing light and hope to a society which even then was virtually unmatched in cruelty, perversion and degradation. Evil flourished throughout that civilization, lay in wait for each little one born to its people, and reached across borders to neighboring nations. God finally removed Abram's growing family from Canaan and its influence into neighboring Egypt. He then waited in mercy for over 400 years until finally, the sin of the Canaanite/Amorite kingdoms "reached its full measure". (See Genesis 15:16) Then, the countless victims of the pervasive Canaanite evil and destruction, as well as the vulnerability of the surrounding nations, must have cried out for God's justice and deliverance.

It was at this moment that God brought His people to the borders of Canaanite territory. The kingdoms that held the land had abundant supplies, strong-walled cities, and well-armed, seasoned armies, renowned for their ruthless strength. But through Moses, and then through Joshua, God told His people to advance courageously and trust Him to totally defeat and destroy the nations occupying the Land. He reminds them that it is He Who is giving them the land -- not because they are mighty or righteous, but because He loves them, He is faithful to His promise, and because of the appalling wickedness of the Canaanites. (See Deuteronomy 7:7-8, 9:5)

1. Read Joshua 23:1-16, part of Joshua's last words from God to the Israelites, after his godly and courageous leadership in the initial conquest of the Land. (They sum up what he and Moses have told them time and again.) As you read through this stirring passage, note the following:  
God's instructions/commands

God's encouragements/promises

## God's warnings

Now turn ahead a few pages to the book of Judges and read Judges 2:6-19.

NOTE: The Baals and Ashtoreths were images representing the false gods worshipped by the Canaanites.

2. a. From this passage, summarize the sequence of events after the death of mighty Joshua.
  
- b. How would you describe the people of Israel at this time? (Notice again verses 16-19.)
  
3. How could God have justly responded to His people during the many years, probably 250+, described in Judges 2:10-19? (Remember Joshua's warning to them in question 1.)

Read Judges 2:20-3:6.

4. From this section, tell how God chose to respond to them during these years, in spite of their disloyalty and stubbornness. (Notice especially 2:21-22 and 3:1-2)

Note: Except for some scattered periods of repentance and faithfulness to their faithful God, Israel pretty much kept on with this behavior for 800 years before God had to finally judge His beloved people and remove them from the land.

5. Looking back over the lesson thus far, what qualities have you seen in your God as He has walked down the centuries with His Canaanite and Israelite people?
  
6. a. Personal: Do those folks remind you a little bit of yourself -- struggling with and falling for the same old problems time after time? Explain.
  
- b. On those dark days of dealing with persisting weakness in your life, what do you think your God wants you to remember about Him? See also Psalm 103:10-14, 130:1-4, 25:4-8; Isaiah 48:17-18.

- c. And what do you think He wants you to remember as you in turn deal with other fallible members of the human race?

Now let's take a look at God carrying out His gracious program laid out in Judges 2 and 3, to teach His people and to keep giving them chances to choose Him and therefore to choose LIFE. We will watch Him in action in the life of Barak, a man who lived during the times of the judges -- a man who was to learn warfare from his God.

Read Judges 4:1-16. Ehud (verse 1) was the judge who preceded Deborah and Barak.

7. Explain Israel's situation from verses 1-3.
  
8. Some have made the mistake of assuming certain spiritual strengths, gifts or weaknesses solely on the basis of gender. Without extra comment or explanatory waivers, Scripture here tells us about the woman Deborah. What do you discover about her in verses 4-5?
  
9. Read verses 6-7. Deborah's message was full of faith-builders from God to Barak. List words or phrases that you think could have especially encouraged him and then explain your choices.
  
10. Enter Barak, man of faith in the making! What is his answer in verse 8?  
  
From what you have learned about the circumstances of his times and, from your own observations of life, why do you think he responded this way?
  
11. At this answer, God could have called the whole thing off! But what is His response through Deborah? (verse 9)
  
12. Was God able to do as He had said? Below, write down the promises He made in verses 6b-7 and 9. Then as you read through the account in verses 10-24, note the verses that show each promise coming to pass.

A great victory was won, and God used not a trained soldier, but Jael, a woman in her home far from the battlefield, to bring a cruel oppressor (verse 2-3) finally to justice. The death that came to Sisera as he slept was undoubtedly quicker and more humane than

the many deaths he had inflicted on those weaker than he. (Also note that Jael was the wife of Heber the Kenite, who had been a traitor and informer in verses 11-13).

13. What do you learn about God as He gives victory even though His voice (the same one that spoke the world into being) is met with weak and wavering faith?
  
14. With Deborah close at hand, Barak sees God defeat Israel's enemies. However, his experience was different than the one God had planned for him. Explain.
  
15. God was surely teaching Barak warfare! What does a God-taught warrior -- a person who dares to venture out at God's word alone -- know and delight in more and more? See Psalm 44:1-7 and Psalm 118:5-13, 21, 28 -- and notice especially the words me and my.

Because of a fallen world, our own fallen hearts and a fierce enemy, Satan, life IS full of battles. But as Psalm 44 (NIV) says, God decrees victories for His people. He has victories planned ahead for us, as we trust Him to be our loving Commander-in-Chief. These "big wins" won't always come in the form of deliverance from pain and struggle - that happens in Heaven! But for now, we have His wisest, personalized care and the kind of victories that touch our deepest need in life - to know Him face to face.

16. How does the seasoned warrior Paul describe the priceless treasures God has in store for you as you learn warfare from Him? See Ephesians 1:17-20, 3:16-19.
  
17. Have these true stories about Israel and Barak given you a new way to look at the challenges (battles!) that are coming your way? Think back through what God has shown you in this lesson, then finish this:  
"Lord, because of what you have personally shown me in your Word this week, I want to..."
  
18. Deborah and Barak came through to the other side of the battle with a song of victory and praise! Take some time to enjoy reading through it in Judges 5:1-31. Amen!

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