

Conquering the Land (1400 – 1100 BCE) – “Deborah and Barak”

Readings: *Judges 4:1-5:31*

Reflections:

- We will see all through Judges the cycle of a judge leading Israel to bring deliverance and peace, it is short lived; Israel sins again and another judge must be raised up. This section highlights how once again God does the unexpected and uses women instead of men.
- Deborah was a prophetess and a leader/judge. Notice this key line: “Barak said to her, ‘If you go with me, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go.’” He was giving in to fear and was not trusting God. Deborah’s response is immediate. “Alright I will go but the honor will now go to a woman.” God is no respecter of persons. He doesn’t care if you are young or old, male or female, or of a particular race. He is looking for people of faith who will trust him.
- The story of Jael is another one of those “gross, how bad can it get” sort of stories. Driving a tent peg through the guy’s temple? Yikes! These stories are there to shock the reader and lead us to say, “Terrible things happen when there is no ongoing solid leadership that brings lasting peace. People must take things into their own hands and it is awful.” It all leads Israel to cry out, “We want a king!” which God grants but is a part of a larger overarching revelation that no human external structure will ever change the human heart. It must come from within by God’s spirit.
- The song of Deborah and Barak shows a connection between the prophetic and songs. In the future many of the prophets of Israel will declare their prophecies through song. It shows the unity of God’s revelation and creativity.
- The song is also interesting in that it is a song to the kings (human power structures) around Israel declaring that God is with the princes of Israel and the willing volunteers. In other words, God is casting himself as the king and all the men of Israel as his sons, princes. The song retells this story of victory including Jael’s tent peg deal. The song delights in how gross it was. The joyful ending declares that every man gets a girl or two and there are some nice clothes to hand out. Well, it seems weird that a woman would help write a song that has this in it but I guess back then it was the norm.

- The ending of the song is great: “May they who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength.” This will be fulfilled when Jesus comes and states about his followers, “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.” (Matthew 5:14) Israel was called to be a light to the Gentiles but failed miserably in that calling. This calling was fulfilled through the coming Christ and those who would become his true followers.