

Old Testament Characters: Barak – Man of Faith

Goldstone Church – 14-Aug-16 10:30am

Judges 4:1-15

Introduction

Although it is easy to identify Deborah as a main character in Judges 4, this passage is also about Barak. Even though Deborah was a great Judge and Prophetess, Barak also has an important part to play, especially as the military commander.

The book of Judges covers a period of few centuries between Joshua dying and Israel's first king being crowned. The first four Judges were:

Judge No 1: Othniel – Caleb's younger brother.

Judge No 2: Ehud - left handed.

Judge No 3: Shamgar – only one verse!

Judge No 4: Deborah – only female judge, a prophetess and a wife.

Want to focus on Barak, Deborah's side-kick. Believe there are some great truths that we can learn from him today.

1. DIVINE ADDRESS (Judges 4:6a)

God calls Barak (v.6a): “[Deborah] *sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali*”

God calls Barak specifically by name - and even gives his address! Kedesh in Naphtali was probably a small village near Sea of Galilee.

Names are important in the Bible. The names used had a purpose, e.g.

- Name could refer to person's birth event, e.g. Moses = “drawn out” from Nile.
- Name could describe parent's reaction to birth, e.g. Isaac = “laughter”
- Name could secure family ties, e.g. John Baptist nearly given father's name – link with his lineage.
- Name could give God's message, e.g. Isaiah's first son, SHEAR-JASHUB = “a remnant will return”
- Name could describe nature or function of a person, e.g. Jesus = “the Lord saves”

Barak in Hebrew means ‘lightening’ or ‘lightening flash’. Same word used when Israelites at Mount Sinai; thunder & lightening sounded, people fearful (Exodus 19:16). Barak is a “bright light” that shines out so large numbers people can see it.

In Isaiah 49:16; God assures His people that their names are treasured - God's people are valuable to Him. God knows each person by name; they are carved on His heart. Similarly, in Judges 4, God knows all about His people. He knew Barak's name, who he was, where lived and what he was like.

God called Barak using Deborah as a messenger (voice box).

Even after 20 years of oppression, even in the darkest of crisis, God knew Barak, knew him by name. God called Barak; He sought him out to have relationship with him.

The God that we worship here today knows us personally. He knows each one of us by name – He even knows where we live. In modern-day language, God knows our Post Code and even our House number.

In tough times, God declares: I know your name, I know who you are, I know what you are going through, I know your circumstances, I have not forgotten you. Today God is calling to you, seeking a relationship with you.

2. DIVINE ASSIGNMENT (Judges 4:6b)

God commands Barak (v.6b): “*The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: ‘Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them...’*”

Barak is called by God, and given his 3-part assignment (v6b):

- i. **GO.** God’s first word for an assignment is often “Go”, e.g.
 - Abram (Genesis 12:1): “Go from your country”.
 - Moses (Exodus 3:10): Go to Pharaoh.
 - Jonah (Jonah 1:1-2): Go to Nineveh.

Although the word “Go” is a correct translation of original Hebrew text, it doesn’t give fullest meaning. In English, “Go” is a command, a directive; there’s an imperative contained within the meaning. That’s the good part of “Go” – that is in Hebrew text. But in English, “Go” is an isolating word, e.g. “Go, be gone” (Go away). This under-current of meaning is not in the Hebrew. Instead, the “Go” here is God saying: “let’s go *together*”; go and live a lifestyle that reflects that you have a relationship with God.

- ii. **TAKE.** “Take with you”. Even though God promises Barak that He will be with him, Barak is also instructed to gather a team of people around him. Barak is not a “one-man ministry”, but has an accompanying team; a support network. The word means ‘to take in hand’, to have companions on the way. God’s assignment to Barak is to “Go”, but equally it is to “Take others with him”.

- iii. **LEAD.** Again, the English language creates problem with this word “lead”, because it makes Barak a leader. But what God commands Barak to do, is to proactively participate in strategic action. This might mean to lead the troops in the usual sense, but could equally mean to utilise the special gifts and talents that are within the team and to allow others to excel.

God’s command to Barak is equally relevant to us today. God is not calling us to rest on our laurels. Being a Christian is not a gimmick or clever idea that makes us feel fuzzy inside. God’s assignment to Barak shows that we have a God of action, not *inaction*. A God of purpose, not purposeless. A God of hope, not hopeless. We have a God who is energetic, lively and vigorous. This is a call to Action.

Important: not action that will in any way gain us salvation, but activity that is a reflection of our relationship with God.

We are being called to:

- Go – to go in the assurance that God is alongside us.
- Take – to gather and be part of a team that does the “go”.
- Lead – to participate and be involved proactively.

3. DIVINE ASSURANCE (Judges 4:8)

Barak declares his dependence on God (v.8): "*Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go."*"

Although the passage suggests that Barak was weak and feeble, Barak is actually an awesome Man of Faith.

There are 3 main references to "Barak" in Bible Concordance. The first is in Judges 4, the second is in Judges 5, and the third in Hebrews 11:32.

(Note: Hebrews 11 is "Hall of Fame" for Men of Faith in Bible.)

And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised... (Hebrews 11:32-33)

Q: how can we reconcile Barak's feeble and weak response in Judges 4, with Barak being called a Faith Hero in Hebrews 11?

Answer: see Barak's response in Judges 4:8a "*Barak said to her*". The original Hebrew text doesn't have "*to her*". It should just be "*Barak said*", i.e. Barak is speaking to God.

In v.6-7, (i) God calls Barak, and (ii) God commands Barak. Deborah is God's messenger (voice box); she is God's human representative on earth. So Barak's response must be to God, "*If you go with me [God], I will go; but if you don't go with me [God], I won't go.*"

Barak realises that the success of the assignment God has given him is not down to him. He knows that God's power is greater than any earthly super-power in front him.

This may also explain why Barak isn't bothered when he's warned that he won't get any credit for the successful outcome. Ultimately, it is God who will win the victory, not Barak. God has promised to go and actively participate with Barak. God is the victor.

Interestingly, Christians today do not need to be like Barak. Unlike Barak, we do not need to ask God whether or not He will go with us, because God has already promised that He will never leave us. "*Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.*" (Matthew 28:20b)

So unlike Barak who (in faith) said, "*if you go with me, I'll go*". We can say (also in faith) "*because you have promised to be with me, I will go*".

We have God's written promise that He will be with us. It's the assurance that we hold on to, as we participate proactively in what God has called us to do.

CONCLUSION

This passage comforts as well as challenges.

If going through tough times, "Dark Valley", remember:

- **God knows you personally.** He knows each of us by name, our personal circumstances, even our Post Code.
- **God assures us of His presence.** God has promised to be with us. This is not a casual promise, but one that is empowered and sealed by God's own Son, Jesus Christ.

Having been comforted with these words, we are presented with a strong challenge. God is calling us into action. We are being called to:

- **Go** – to go in the assurance that God is alongside us.
- **Take** – to gather people and to be part of a team.
- **Lead** – to participate and be involved proactively.

Barak's name means a "bright light for everyone to see".

Let us be people this week, who are also bright lights – people who shine out in the darkness. Shining out, so everyone can see that we have a loving, personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

AMEN