

Let's open our Bibles tonight to Judges 5. Like I said, we almost had 250 kids here this week. We have 27 high schoolers and junior highers just serving this week as well with the VBS. So, praise the Lord for that generation. (Clapping) Glad to see them out there. I didn't know when the VBS kids and then the other kids began and ended. You could just look out the window, they're all kind of young. But God is using them mightily for sure.

The book of Judges chronologically follows the book of Joshua, the one that we just finished. It will take you, in a historical standpoint, from about 1380 B.C. to about 1040 B.C., or about 340 years forward. It'll take us all the way through to the time of the first king of Israel, King Saul. There are twelve to fifteen judges, depending on who you count; and we will run into a couple of those explanations in the weeks to come. They overlap, some of them, in their reign. There're about 410 years of rulership listed in the book. The painting of this picture, of this book, though, is very grim. It is certainly one of the more depressing books of the Bible in terms of how well the people did during these four centuries of time.

There was a pattern established that is repeated seven times in this book. It's a pattern where the people had rest and God was blessing them. Rest didn't produce much faithfulness. They took advantage of it. They began to rebel and kind of cut back in their devotion. As a result, God who loves them brought retribution to their life. He made it difficult for them to live in rebellion. Sometimes it took quickly; sometimes it took years. Eventually the people fell on their knees and repented. "God, we're sorry. We don't want to be where we're at. Please forgive us." And then God would send a deliverer, a judge, and restore them into that place of rest. And then you would think, "Well now they learned their lesson." No, and then they'd start it all over again.

The main contribution to the problem was two-fold. Number one, they didn't get rid of all of the enemies that were in the land after Joshua was older and stepped down, and God divided the land amongst the tribes. And He said, "Now take your land back, take out the Canaanites" and all these other "ites" that were living there. And God was going to use the people to bring judgment upon the Canaanite nations that were an abomination in His sight. The people didn't do that and, as a

result, these pockets of enemies grew. Their influence over their children grew. The idolatry blossomed. And eventually they would end up in captivity. Additionally, we are told early on in the book of Judges that when Joshua died, the next generation of folks that came along didn't know the LORD like the previous generation had; that they hadn't passed along the knowledge of God or the testimony of His power, and so the parents didn't pass it on. So there as a second generation already in the land with very little personal relationship with God. They didn't know the history, they didn't experience firsthand their power. And it's one thing to teach VBS to the kids; it's another thing to convince them that they can know the Lord themselves. And unless they have firsthand information, secondhand information is not going to do it. It gets you started, but it can't end there.

Well last week we looked at four judges - a fellow named Othniel, a fellow named Ehud, a fellow in one verse - Shamgar, and then we ended with chapter 4 and the story of Deborah and her leadership in Israel along with a judge that God had chosen named Barak who, at least initially, didn't start off with very much faith, but God eventually would use him.

I just want to spend a couple of minutes in chapter 4 kind of getting our bearing since we're going to be in chapter 5 tonight, which comes as a result of chapter 4. But there was no way we were going to get both of these chapters in, in one week, so we divided them up.

Verses 1-3 of chapter 4 tells us, "When Ehud" (the judge) "was dead, the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD." There's that sin-drome beginning. And God, in love for them, handed them over again to an oppressor - this time the fellow's name was Jabin. He as the king of the Canaanite nation. He lived in a place called Hazor. He had a commander of his army whose name was Sisera. And we are told in verse 3 that the domination of the Canaanites over God's people was the result of oppression - brute strength or force. The Canaanites had nine hundred chariots, which is a huge advantage over marching armies, let's say. And so the children of Israel were overwhelmed and kind of muscled into submission, and they terribly suffered. They didn't immediately begin to cry out for help and, for the first time in the book of Judges, when they did, God didn't immediately send help. It took some time. But as they cried out, and over time, the LORD spoke to this woman, Deborah, and began to direct her. In fact, in verse 6 she went to Barak, and she said, " 'Has not the LORD God of Israel

commanded, "Go and deploy troops?" ' " And God gave, through the prophetess Deborah, a direction for this man who was to lead an army into battle. Deborah is the only woman judge that we have. She is one of the prophetesses of her day. She spoke to the nation. She's amazing in the Bible, certainly. But she told Barak to take ten thousand men from two tribes - the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun - and to go out and to fight this guy named Sisera with his nine hundred chariots. And God said through Deborah (to this man), "And God says He's going to deliver these folks into your hand, and we're going to be rid of them." And so verse 7, " 'I will send Sisera out against you, and I will deliver him into your hand.' " The problem for Barak was (verses 8-10), he didn't like being on that side of the prophecy, the prophecy that said, "You go, and God'll be with you." And so he balked, and he said, "Well, prophetess, if you'll go, I'll go. If you believe it as much as you want me to believe it, then we've got a deal." And so she said, "I'll go with you because I trust the LORD. However, because of your unwillingness to trust Him, the deliverance or the glory is going to go not to a man but to a woman." And in the culture that would have been difficult for him, certainly, to bear. But she said, "You failed to trust in God's Word." And so, as they went to battle, there was a man from the Kenite family. Kenites were descendants of Moses' father-in-law. They were usually friendly to Israel. They were nomadic, if you will; they followed along like Bedouins. But there was a fellow named Heber. He was a friend, he was a traitor to this general Sisera, and as Barak and Deborah began to maneuver their troops and to do what the LORD had told them to do, he would go and tell him everything that was going on in the Israeli camp. And so Sisera would mobilize the full strength of his army and all, and they could almost watch it following them around. And they waited. In verse 14, it says that the LORD came to Deborah one day, and He said, "Okay, get up! Today's the day. Today is the day that I'm going to deliver Sisera into your hand. Hasn't the LORD gone out before you?" And the LORD spoke to this fellow, Barak, and this time he doesn't balk; he agrees. In fact, he is mentioned in Hebrews 11:32 in his faith going, and God mentions him by name. Whatever held him up the first time, he was willing now to step out the second. And so God honored this man's faith even though it was slow in coming, if you will.

Chapter 5 will tell us tonight that the victory that God gave to Israel over this enormously strong army was to send an unseasonable rain into a valley that was normally dry at this time of the year, along a very small brook; and instead this downpour, this flash flood, this freak rainstorm stuck all nine hundred chariots in the mud. It is the same tactic that the LORD used to get rid of the Egyptians, you remember, when He was bringing His people out through the Red Sea. So they may

have had nine hundred chariots, but if they're all stuck in the mud, not very helpful; and God kind of eliminated, if you will, that benefit.

Well, as this battle is going on, we are told (beginning in verse 17) a quick story of a lady named Jael, and she was the traitor Heber's wife. She had remained faithful to the LORD and to God's people; he had not, he had sided, if you will, with the other side. But in the midst of the battle, as it looked like they were going to lose the war, this fellow Sisera got off of his chariot, and he ran for cover, and he ran to the only place he knew - he ran to Heber's house. Knocked on his tent door and figured he could hide there. He was a "friendly" in the midst of a dangerous place. Heber wasn't home, but his wife was, and she welcomed him, and she gave him a bottle of nice, warm milk to drink. And he was exhausted, and he laid down, and in a minute he was asleep. And she hammered a tent stake through his temple and killed him. Tough woman. I think. When Barak came by that place that she lived, she called him over and said, "Hey, look what I did," and the glory went to her. And the battle was really over, and the Canaanite domination, at least for that time, was overthrown.

Well, all of that we did last week. As a result of that great victory, you will read (at the end of verse 24 of chapter 4) that the children of Israel's hands were growing stronger against Canaan and the king until they destroyed him. This was that kind of slow but yet steady deliverance as they began to again walk with God.

Well then tonight we want to pick up chapter 5. It is one lesson. It's thirty-one verses. It is written in prose, in Hebrew poetry. It is meant to be sung. I have no idea how the tune might have gone. We actually came up with some ideas last week, but they weren't very fitting. But this great and miraculous victory that God brought to His people - now again on that sin-drome - and now they're back where they needed to be. And the enemy was far stronger than they were, and yet God delivered them. And so Deborah writes this worship chorus, and she's, like I said, quite a woman. She was a judge and a prophetess and a song writer and a wife and a mother. I don't know where she found the time for all of it. But these are the lyrics that she and Barak wrote in the day of the victory. Now, the song focuses almost entirely on the goodness of God's grace to His people - that if they will look to Him then He'll be faithful to them. If we'll look to Him, He'll be faithful to us. It sings of His delivering power, of His call to glorify Him, that their success depended on His blessing; and this song God gave them. Deborah even goes out of her way to mention those who refused to participate when God was in the process

of delivering them - that there were folks who just kind of sat on their hands. And so the song honors the faithful, it also marks the less-than-faithful in song. Some of her lyrics add details to the battle that we just discussed, the campaign that we just reviewed. But because most of the truths in the Old Testament were passed along - besides, obviously, writing down eventually - through oral communication, singing was far easier than just memorization. And so you'll find a lot of this Hebrew poetry not only in the poetic books but also in the historic books when it comes to worship. Hebrew poetry doesn't rhyme. Our poetry tends to rhyme. Right? "Roses are red, ....." We do rhymes. But they use parallelisms which means that they either rhyme thought (rather than words) or they set thoughts or truths at odds with each other. So whether you read the book of Psalms or Proverbs or the Song of Solomon, the book of Ecclesiastes, or any of the books of poetry, it'll be helpful that you (at least as you're reading) realize that - at least in Hebrew thought - God's communication in poetic terms was to either compare or to contrast ideas or truths. They are sometimes called synonymous parallelism (pretty good for me - look at that!), complementary parallelism (which means that they put things together that are of the same ilk, and then one kind of adds to the other, kind of crescendos), and then there is what is called antithetical parallelism (I'm doin' pretty good tonight!), which are words of contrast. So in Hebrew you kind of repeat things but put them in a different way. It intensifies the meaning much like if you put an exclamation point behind what you are saying. But it was God's way of reinforcing truth. And a lot of these things were sung because that's just the way you memorized them.

I don't know about you, but if I get out of the car in the morning having listened to some song, it'll be with me all day. If it's some rock and roll song, and I'm running around the church, not good. (Laughing) So I have to be careful. But that stupid song stays with you.....every useless little bit of information is stuck in my head. I can still sing all of "American Pie" to you. (Laughing) Every word! I would like to clear my mind of that and put something useful in there - like memorizing the whole book of James. But no, no, I've got Don McLean in my head. I can sing his stuff. So that's how these things, I guess, came around. And the people have grabbed hold of them, and the truths became ingrained, and you could sing them when you were a kid and when you're old; you remember we sang around the campfire. Well, here're the songs, but they presented truth. And so you'll find them a lot in Hebrew poetry - that it's either the complementary or the antagonistic kind of a position that God will take to communicate truth and reinforce truth to us. So, sometimes you can forget names or places or

conversations or dates, but usually you don't forget lyrics. Comes on the radio, everyone's singing along. It's amazing.

Verse 1 says (and look where we are, we're starting already), "Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying: 'When leaders lead in Israel, when the people willingly offer themselves, bless the LORD!' " When leaders lead, and people follow the LORD, then we're blessed. That's true, isn't it? And for Deborah and for the people that went out to battle against this overwhelming army, good leadership (and good leadership resulted in godly people following) brought the blessings of God upon the nation. I love the verse. And look, if God's hand is at work, you can see it in the leadership He raises up and the people's response to that leadership where they're willingly sacrificing themselves to the LORD. Great leaders inspire people to walk with God. They know the way, they go the way, they show the way. That's what leaders do. And when they had a leader like Deborah, the people followed the LORD, their faith was encouraged, the victory was sure, they set an example, and people followed that example. And so it started off - if the leaders will lead, then the people will follow, praise the LORD. God is good. God help us to have good leadership. Without good leadership, there's great trouble. It's in Proverbs 29:2. It says, "When the righteous rule, there's peace. But when the wicked are in the place of rulership, the people groan." Groan! Well, they'd been groaning, but now they had someone that they could follow; and that Barak guy wasn't it. It wasn't him. Deborah led. Even he was encouraged by her willingness to lead. And so when leaders lead - how important that we have good leaders.

We read in verse 3, " 'Hear, O kings! Give ear, O princes! I, even I, will sing to the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel. LORD, when You went out from Seir, when You marched from the field of Edom, the earth trembled and the heavens poured, the clouds also poured water; the mountains gushed before the LORD, this Sinai, before the LORD God of Israel.' " The judge Deborah was not ashamed of her faith before her contemporaries. Look what she does. She cries out in song to the kings and to the princes round about. She sings loudly and openly. She recalls His past work and His deliverance and how the LORD had brought deliverance this time with the rain that had fallen; and she'll mention it again in a minute.

Verse 6, " 'In the days of Shamgar,' " (that was that third judge that we read in chapter 3:31, just one verse) " 'son of Anath, in the days of Jael,' " (the woman who

ran that tent stake through the head of Sisera) " 'the highways were deserted, and the travelers walked along the byways. Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel, until I, Deborah arose, arose a mother in Israel.' " So, God has been working, and in these days of the judges notice (it says in verses 6 and 7) that there was a fear in the land to be out in public, to be walking along the roadsides. Shamgar, as we talked about last week, was a guy who had come from a pagan background. His dad's name was the name of one of their gods, in fact. He served as a farmer. He had an ox goad as his weapon of choice. The LORD used him to wipe out six hundred Philistine terrorists that threatened God's people. But needless to say, in those days, even in the days of these judges, there was a tremendous fear, and there was a vacuum and a vacancy in the roads because of the difficulty that they had brought upon themselves "until," Deborah said, "God raised me up" to be their judge and their deliverer. And God used her mightily to turn the nation back to Him.

We read in verse 8, " 'They chose new gods; then there was war in the gates; not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel. My heart is with the rulers of Israel who offered themselves willingly with the people. Bless the LORD!' " And so it had been difficult, but God had raised her up, and, as a result of her leadership, the people had turned to faith again. They had willingly come to offer themselves to the LORD. Influence, leadership - it's vital. She called herself, "I was a mother in Israel." What a great verse 7 at the end. "A mother in Israel." I don't know where she finds the time.

I talked to a mom a couple of days ago who said.....she was actually praying about what to do in ministry, and she said, "So far, I'm just a mother." And I thought well, what more could you be than "just a mother"? I mean, mothers have the greatest influence of all. I remember being in England several years ago, and there was a lady that we were staying with who had a sign across the sink in her kitchen, and it said, "Divine service offered here three times a day." And she saw herself as just being called by the Lord to serve her family. I always remember that. What a good placard. Right?

So she was a mother. Her heart was one of taking care of the nation as a prophet and as a judge but like they belonged to her. And so she began to sing about the leadership that had raised up around her, who had responded to her call, who were willing to serve (verse 9) the people.

Verse 10, " 'Speak, you who ride on white donkeys, who sit in judges' attire, and who walk along the road. Far from the noise of the archers, among the watering places, there they shall recount the righteous acts of the LORD, the righteous acts for His villagers in Israel; then the people of the LORD shall go down to the gates. Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, sing a song! Arise, Barak, and lead your captives away, O son of Abinoam! Then the survivors came down, the people against the nobles; the LORD came down for me against the mighty. From Ephraim were those whose roots were in Amalek. After you, Benjamin, with your peoples, from Machir rulers came down, and from Zebulun those who bear the recruiter's staff. And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; as Issachar, so was Barak sent into the valley under his command; among the divisions of Reuben there were great resolves of heart.' " And so Deborah starts to sing about all of the people that.....she started with that, "Praise the LORD when the leaders lead and the people rise up." She keeps mentioning that - three or four different times - and she sings here about the people's willingness to come to battle and wants to give the LORD the praise (as she did in verse 2 and again in verse 9), talking about this willingness to sacrifice. The tribes moved under Deborah's leadership. She was able to spark the people into action. They'd been oppressed for years, their relationship with the LORD wasn't very good - that's why they'd been suffering. But now they were tired of it, and so she stands before them, and she begins to call this confederation of tribes together to fight against the Canaanites. Initially she had said (when we talked in chapter 4), "Get then thousand guys. Get them from Zebulun and Naphtali" (back in chapter 4:6). But here's this bigger picture because when the ten thousand showed up, the rest of the nation was rallied as well. And so she begins to sing of their faithfulness and their sacrifice and how there was a great resolve, notice, in their heart, and thousands upon thousands of people came.

And then we read of Reuben, there at the end of verse 15, that they had "great resolve." Verse 16, " 'Why did you sit among the sheepfolds, to hear the pipings for the flocks? The divisions of Reuben have great searchings of heart.' " Or they have to answer now. " 'Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan, and why did Dan remain on ships? Asher continued at the seashore, and stayed by his inlets. Zebulun is a people who jeopardized their lives to the point of death, Naphtali also, on the heights of the battlefield.' " And Deborah, in this liturgical kind of a psalm, brings high praise for faithful people, and yet she begins to mock, or at least challenge, those who showed a tremendous lack of devotion in either giving reasons why they didn't show up (like Reuben) or just not showing up at all without explanation. And

she picks on four of these tribes to lay them out - Reuben and Gilead, Dan and Asher. Surrounded by the enemy, these folks were getting whooped as a nation, and yet, under that kind of threat, these four tribes seemed to care less. They didn't move, they weren't motivated. If you will follow those four tribes clearly through the Scriptures, I would challenge you to look for them or go through them on a computer program, and you will find that they had very little to offer and rarely are found involved in a positive light when it came to the future of the nation itself. When God called them as a whole, these guys were always lagging behind - didn't seem to have much interest and really weren't plugged in. And so here's the principle - use what you have or lose it. Jesus said (in Luke 19:26), " 'Everyone who has will be given, and those who have not, even what they have will be taken away.' " And I think you can see that illustrated here. This is really the outworking, if you will, of that Scripture. So here're a bunch of guys - in the big picture of Israel - who live for themselves, and they lost all they had hoped to protect because they were willing to be spectators and not participants. And that's, unfortunately, even in churches the way things so often go. The work is usually done by 10% of the church while 90% watch or have excuse. I forget the guy's name who was explaining coaching football (a few years ago), but someone said to him, "How would you describe a football game to someone who didn't know anything about it?" And he said, "A football game is where twenty-two men are out on the field desperately doing their work while 50,000 people in the stands, who desperately need exercise, are watching." (Laughing) And I thought that's a great explanation of football, right? Think about that next time you're plopped in front of the TV for nine hours. But it's like that in the church, too. There're plenty of needs, but the hard work is done by so few by comparison. And so she begins to mark out, "Praise the LORD for when the leaders lead and the people willingly give themselves to the LORD. And here's Naphtali - they risked their very lives for you. And here's Zebulun who put their necks on the line. And because of that, we're finding God's victory. But how about you guys?" she says. "How about you?"

Verse 19 she goes back to this battle, and she says, " 'The kings came and fought, then the kings of Canaan fought in Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo; they took no spoils of silver. They fought from the heavens; the stars from their courses fought against Sisera. The torrent of Kishon swept them away, that ancient torrent, the torrent of Kishon. O my soul, march on in strength! Then the horses' hooves pounded, the galloping, galloping of his steeds.' " And so we talked last week, and mentioned again tonight, that this sudden rainstorm came that flooded the valley, and their chariots got stuck in the mud. And I think I mentioned to you

last week that the Canaanite understanding of gods was that there was a god for everything - the mountains, the valleys. There was a god for everything. And when they fought, it was always the fighting of the gods - whose god would win? And so Baal was the god of the storm, the weather, and God took him on in the valley and showed Himself to be strong, taking this little Kishon Brook (and you can see the Kishon Brook in Israel - it's little, it's like a gutter). But it had a raging storm come in the dry season, and the LORD fought from the heavens. That's what we read. And then she writes, "Fight on! O my soul, march out in your strength! God is with us." So she was encouraged while these four tribes never got to see the hand of God at work because they never put themselves anywhere in that position to be dealt with.

Notice it says (in verse 19), " 'by the waters of Megiddo.' " Megiddo is the battleground where the Battle of Armageddon will be fought - the final battle before the Lord comes back. It is mentioned in Revelation 16 and 19, in particular. Historically, over two hundred major battles with countries have been fought in the same valley. It is the most fought-on turf in the world, amazingly so. So, if you ever have a chance to watch what has happened, what has yet to happen is far greater. But it's always been a place of great war, it seems.

We read on, and we read in verse 23, " ' "Curse Meroz," said the angel of the LORD, "curse its inhabitants bitterly, because they did not come to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty." ' " And we'll come back to that in just a minute.

Verse 24, " 'Most blessed among women is Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; blessed is she among women in tents. He asked for water, she gave milk; she brought out cream in a lordly bowl. She stretched her hand to the tent peg, her right hand to the workmen's hammer; she pounded Sisera, she pierced his head, she split and struck through his temple. At her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still; at her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell dead.' " (Pastor Jack sings), "Faithfully she split his head, doo dah, doo dah." (Laughing) "Laying on the ground he's dead, all the doo dah day." I'm always amazed. Well you get the picture, right? It's a song.

Verse 28, " 'The mother of Sisera looked through the window, and cried out through the lattice, "Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why carries the clatter of his chariots?" Her wisest ladies answered her, yes, she answered herself, "Are

they not finding and dividing the spoil: to every man a girl or two; for Sisera, plunder of dyed garments, plunder of garments embroidered and dyed, two pieces of dyed embroidery for the neck of the looter?" Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD! But let those who love Him be like the sun when it comes out in full strength.' So the land had rest for forty years." So while the children of Israel sang, the mother of Sisera worried about the lateness of her son's arrival. Encouraged by her counselors, "Oh, you know he's good at stealing stuff, and when he comes home, he'll bring plenty of loot along with him." Wrong! He was an enemy of the LORD, and the LORD dealt with him severely.

So you have this beautiful picture of Deborah, balanced and professional, a wife, a mother, a prophet, a motivator, a leader. Could use some women like this, couldn't we? More.

But I want to look at verse 23 for a minute because there's something interesting in what the LORD, through the mouth of Deborah, pronounces against one city. In her song, Deborah had thanked the LORD for those who had come by faith, responding to the leaders by praising the LORD that they had been risen up, the good example, the much sacrifice. In verses 15 and 16, and down through that way, she had pointed out those who hadn't come to help. While the whole nation trembled in fear, these guys sat by the coasts, stayed on their ships, stayed on their land. And while she honored the likes of Zebulun and Naphtali, she mixed in these guys who hadn't been very helpful - Reuben and Gilead and Dan and Asher; even saying (in verses 15 and 16) Reuben had good intentions but also had great excuses to not show up. So she was going to have to search her heart and justify her excuses.

So there were a lot of folks who stayed home, a lot of folks who stayed uninvolved, a lot of folks who were unmoved by need or cause, and they are marked in the song for shame that they didn't care for God's people. They remained aloof and away and selfish and kind of unconcerned. Even though God walked with them (verses 18-22 - He bogged down the chariots, He overcame the enemy), they could have come and seen God's hand mightily at work as a little brook became a Class 5 rapid. But they weren't there. And then, in the midst of that, before going back to worship the LORD for the faithfulness of the women that God used, and then yet the mother of this wicked man whose heart was going to be broken, she was proud of his thievery and robbery and his way of life, and that wasn't going to work. "God, may all of Your enemies perish!"

But in the middle of verse 23, it almost stands out – the curse of Meroz. With the acknowledgements of those who had given all and then the indictments of those who failed to come, God speaks to one city. And notice it says “the angel of the LORD.” The LORD Himself speaks to a city that, in English, means “refuge” because this little city had failed to do anything at all. The question becomes why single out one city? And the answer is pretty straightforward – this battle was fought on its border. Or, in other words, this city was right in the middle of the greatest place of suffering when the Canaanites were in power. If there was a group of people that should have loved to see these guys taken out, would have loved to see the freedom come to their borders, it would have been this town. And yet, when the battle came to the area, and when God raised up Deborah and the thousands of soldiers and all, the place that found its most difficulty, and would have benefited most from its emancipation, didn't lift a finger to help. They remained neutral. And it does seem like they were afraid to take a stand for the LORD lest the battle would go wrong, and they would be sitting on the borders with an enemy that knew that they had taken the wrong side. So they tried to stand in the middle, if you will. The non-involvement policy was going to be their hope, and they didn't want, in the long run, to be losing because of their positioning. It was a place of refuge, it was a border town with Canaan. And they did nothing. And so notice that the LORD raises up His voice against the city Himself, cursing their inhabitants because, it says, they didn't come to help the LORD. Now does the LORD need their help? No! But when God wants you to be involved, you should be involved. He doesn't need your help. But He wants you involved. He's not depending upon you. But He also doesn't like you just to sit around and do nothing. There is a sin of doing nothing, and these guys were guilty of doing nothing, and God speaks to them a bitter curse. Not just a curse. I would think the LORD cursing you would be enough. But then He goes, “Yeah, it's a bitter curse.” “Oh, I don't want to even hear it. It's worse than I thought.”

So, God had marvelously moved in restoring His people. Deborah had had great influence for what would turn out to be the next forty years. The land (verse 31 at the end) would do well with the LORD again. There would be a relationship with God re-established. It should go into the annals of her credit, of her faithfulness. She'd set the tone. But in the midst of the faith and in the blessings and the exploits in His name, there stood a city that would simply do absolutely nothing to serve the LORD. They wouldn't sacrifice at all. Jesus said (in Luke 10:2) to His disciples, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” There's work to be

done. But either you get yourself involved, and you trust the Lord, and you give it your all, or you find the curse of doing nothing landing on your life. Notice that the call had come to help the LORD. I would like to help the LORD. Because if I come to help the LORD, and I just watch Him work, we're going to do fine. Me and the LORD win every time. I'll help the LORD. If I come to help you, we may lose. If you come to help me, we may be in trouble. But when we're called to help the LORD, how can we lose? This wasn't a risk. This was just a call to participate. And their sin was one of absolute indifference. They didn't care. They didn't care at all.

So, God doesn't need our help, but He wants to use us. Isn't that something? He wants to use you. So any excuse that you make like, "Well, I'm too tired, I'm too busy, I haven't got time, I don't have the capacity, I'm short on skills, I don't know what I can do" - all of that is baloney. Because He just calls you to help Him. Now He'll do the work. So you're just stuck having to come along. "Well, I can't do anything" (Pastor Jack speaking in a whining tone). "Yeah, come with Me." Because the only sin here is the people who did nothing, who absolutely parked it and just wanted the benefit of the faithfulness of others and of the faith of others and of the victory of others, but they didn't want to participate at all. In the movies, the bad guy's always doing bad things. You can watch movies and go, "That's a bad guy." Sometimes in the way he looks at you, that's the bad guy. But when you get into the Bible, and you begin to read the parables of Jesus, the bad guy is usually the guy doing nothing. Doing nothing. The guy who buries his talent - he's the bad guy. The guy who walks by on the Jericho Road, the man who's been beat up, and he won't help him, he'll just cross the street. He's the bad guy. The bad guy's the do-nothing guy who's cursed so bitterly.

How much God wants to work in our lives and in our world today, but He's chosen to use the church. Now we might look around and go, "Pfft. Bad choice! You should have sent a bunch of angels, dressed them up like heroes, put on a Superman outfit and Spiderman, and then we could all, 'This is God's work!' " But He's chosen to use you and me. And it's good for Him because He gets all the credit. We look around and go, "Yeah, we can't take any credit, it must be His work." He has chosen to work with us. Right? So, in bringing the knowledge of His love, the direction that is needed in hearts, there's lots of work to be done. But doing nothing - in God's eyes - is sin, especially for the people who would seek refuge (which is what the name of this city means) for themselves without taking on the responsibility of the well-being of others. "I want to benefit walking with Jesus. I want to be in

church. I want God to bless me and answer my prayers and give me what I want. But the minute I have to help someone else, I'm really busy. I want refuge! But I haven't got time to be a refuge or a blessing." And from the mouth of the LORD, bitter curse. Come to help the LORD against the mighty. Come and help. That's the issue. God has called us to action. You haven't been saved to sit, you've been saved to serve. "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). Paul said in Romans 2:13, "Don't be hearers of the law. They're not the ones that are just in the sight of God. It's the doers of the law." It's always the doers, isn't it? "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth," John will write (in 1 John 3:18) at the end of his life. Jesus said (there in John 14:15), "If you love Me," what will you do? "You'll keep My commandments." You'll do something. You'll act upon it.

So here're a bunch of folks in a town that do nothing. And the LORD goes (as God is having Deborah sing the praises of God's victory, except for those guys), "Cursed be them, they've done nothing." Towards the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). It's the doer. "Those who hear My sayings and don't do them, they build their house on the sand. Those who hear My words and do them, they build their house upon the rock." And the foolish man is going to have his house fall apart, but the wise man is going to build by doing what God has said. These guys did nothing.

Jesus told a similar story. You might remember that discussion (in Matthew 21) where Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees, and He said, "Let Me ask you a question. There's a guy that had two sons. And the first son came to him, and the dad said, 'Son, go to work today in my vineyard,' and he said, 'I'm not going.' But afterwards he went away and thought, 'Well, that's not really right. I should go.' And he did. And the second son came in, and dad told him the same thing. He said, 'Okay, dad, I'll go,' and he walked out and went out with his buddies and didn't do anything at all." And Jesus said to these Pharisees, "Which of the two did the will of the father?" and they said, "Well, the first one did." And Jesus said, "Truly the tax collectors and the harlots are going to get to heaven before you" because they may have lived a life that says, "No, I'm not going," but at some point they realized that was the wrong way to live, and they turn to the Lord, and they find life. Whereas the righteous people in the world, "Oh, yeah, I'm going to church, I've got a Bible in my house somewhere." They're the holy folks. "Oh, we walk with God." But in the end, they don't show it because they talk, but they don't do, and they don't

respond. It was the doer and not the hearer that Jesus spoke of entering in. And there're a lot of people whose only service to the Lord is lip service. That's all they do. They just talk. You don't see them. In reality, their words alone mean nothing. Nor do they mean anything later. We should have, probably, less talk and more doing. Right? And it's easy to talk about problems. I hear it all the time. We're pastors. We get complaints. I should have, over my desk, "Complaint Department." People come and want to point out their concerns, they want to elaborate on what they see, they want to tell me what's needed, but they usually don't lift a finger to be the answer to those issues. There's a lot of talking. There's little doing. But it's nothing new.

The people of Meroz undoubtedly spoke often about the horrible bondage that they felt themselves in, living on the border with their Canaanite neighbors. Yet when they're called to stand for the LORD, and to stand with the LORD, having the promise of the LORD, they do nothing. Cursed for doing nothing. Not for doing the wrong thing. Right? We can all agree, "Yeah, that guy did the wrong thing." No. These guys did nothing. "I didn't do anything wrong." Yeah, that's wrong. You didn't do anything. Period. When Elijah was running from Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 19), after the slaying of her prophets, he ran for a long time, and he was very discouraged. He had a great victory over the prophets of Baal. But the LORD proved that they were false; a lot of the people repented as a result of his faithfulness, but he ran because the queen had threatened to kill him. When he finally stopped running, and he was in the middle of nowhere, God spoke to him in a cave, and it says that he stood in the cave mouth where he'd spent the night, and the LORD came to him and said, "Hey, Elijah." "Yes, LORD." "What are you doing here? I hate this place. It's in the middle of nowhere." "Oh, LORD, I've been very zealous for You, and everyone's forsaken You, and they've torn down Your altars. They're killing Your prophets. I think I'm the only guy left that's faithful to You, and now they want to kill me. So I'm hiding." And the LORD spoke to him and basically said, "All right, knucklehead. Go to work. I've called you to be a prophet. Here's where I want you to go. Here's what I want you to do. Now go do it. Now!" And off he went to do the prophet stuff and found out he wasn't the only guy at all. "I have lots for you to do." Yet he was sure he was the only guy that would be faithful left to the LORD.

So let me ask you something. What are you doing for the Lord today? You don't have to answer to me. And where has God called you and His Spirit summoned you where you have not gone? And what excuses do you make for yourself constantly?

What have you not done that you should be doing? What have you heard from the Lord that should have stirred you, but it hasn't moved you? Let me just say this to you - if your ministry is to sit by, that's a cursed life. It really is. There's so much more available. Just imagine what stories the Zebulun people and the Naphtali people might have been able to tell when the families got together. "And man, we were facing down these chariots, and that guy was turning around. I thought I was dead, and all of a sudden the thunder and the lightning.....and they got stuck. I looked up, and it was like the LORD was giving me one of these." They experienced the delivering power of God. These guys never did because they just stayed put. It's a cursed life to be so close to the action, in a position where you could experience the work of God, where you could make a world of difference, and you don't. And you just get by. And living for Jesus means as long as He's paying my bills and keeping me healthy and giving me what I want, I am so blessed. Well, good for you. But what are you doing with all that He's given you? You don't want to belong to this city as a citizen, where there's no help found for the work of the LORD in this town. Nobody gets witnessed to, nobody gets reached out to, no one is involved. They are just not coming to the help of the LORD against the mighty. They're not showing up. If it was up to them, every missionary could come home; no one supported. Every ministry in a church would have to shut down because you won't show up. It just becomes a place of emptiness, and it's a curse. God can work by many or by few. Don't think for a minute He needs your help. If He can take out the nine hundred chariots, it doesn't really matter if two tribes or four show up. It's pretty much the chariots, and God took them out.

On the other hand, God takes note of those who come, and He takes note of those who don't; for those who speak and seek benefits at others' faithfulness, and those who will be faithful.

Chapter 5 is a worship song. It records the victory and the faith of some, but it also points out the idleness of others. And it should be a reminder to us and a lesson to us that there's a consequence for doing nothing. And there's a tremendous blessing waiting for those who'll get busy. It's just the way it is. But don't think God doesn't see it.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson  
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