

**DOWNWARD SPIRAL, PART 5: “A SONG OF DELIVERANCE”
JUDGES 5:1-31**

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone! If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God for us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

We're currently in Part 5 of our sermon series called “Downward Spiral,” where we're going through the book of Judges together.

And today's sermon is titled: “A Song of Deliverance.”

So let's get right into it.

Sermon Introduction

The first CD I ever bought was called “Hybrid Theory” by the band Linkin Park.

I remember taking it to my room and taking out the cover, which had all the song lyrics in it, and then playing the whole album straight, while reading along with the lyrics as each song played.

I could resonate with a lot of what they were singing about at the time, and I loved those songs, but it was more of music for me to *consume* and *experience*, rather than for me to *contribute* to or *express*.

After all, I *bought* the CD. The music was *performed*. And I was *entertained*.

<pause>

Now, the *medium* by which we listen to songs has changed—from tapes to CDs to mp3 players to now playing from our phones—but I think *how* the world thinks about songs has probably stayed somewhat the same.

We live in a world where, for the general public, songs are *consumed* more than they are *expressed*. We listen to songs to be *entertained*, we go to concerts to watch songs *performed*, we watch shows where singers are *evaluated*.

And if we're not careful, I think this kind of mentality can also creep into how we understand songs of worship to the Lord.

<pause>

So in church gatherings, perhaps some of us are *hesitant* to sing loudly because we think of singing more as *performance* rather than *praise*—as *entertainment* rather than *expressing* our hearts to God.

Perhaps we don't think our singing is good enough, and we feel uncomfortable singing out loud, because we don't think we're that great at singing—perhaps it even feels embarrassing.

But we have to understand that, as God's people, we're *not* singing to perform, to entertain, or to be evaluated, but we're singing as an expression of *praise* to our God who sees our *hearts*—and who is pleased by our singing.

We have a great God to sing *to*, a great family to sing *with*, and a great salvation to sing *about*.

And if we understand *that*, then our hearts are *bursting* to praise our God.

And that's a bit of what we're going to see in today's passage as God's people *burst* into song in the book of Judges.

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Judges 5:1-31.

I'd encourage you to keep your Bibles open to this passage and look down at verses that are referred to throughout the sermon.

If you need access to a Bible, you can download the ESV Bible app, or just ask someone next to you, and I'm sure they'd be happy to share with you.

<pause>

Remember, "judges" here doesn't refer to judicial or court judges, but these judges were military leaders that God raised up to deliver his people from an oppressor. They were not kings over all of Israel, but they were more like clan or tribal leaders.

Last week, in Judges 4, we saw how the people of Israel *again* did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, so the Lord disciplined them by giving them over to Jabin king of Canaan and his commander Sisera who oppressed them cruelly for 20 years.

When the people *cried out* to the Lord, the Lord *responded* to them through Deborah the *prophetess*, who summoned *Barak* to be the next judge-deliverer for his people.

Barak made a call to arms to the people of Israel, and they prepared for battle against the mightier Canaanite army with 900 chariots of iron.

The Lord "routed" or threw the Canaanite army into a panic at the Kishon River, and Barak and the Israelites completely destroyed the Canaanite army.

Meanwhile, Sisera fled from the battle into the tent of Jael, someone whom he *thought* was an ally of the Canaanites, but she ended up giving him milk and tucking him to sleep, and then killing him by hammering a tent peg through his temple.

And the narrative ended with the people of Israel continuing to press harder against Jabin king of Canaan until they destroyed him as well, thereby ending his 20-year oppressive reign over them.

So that was the *story* from last week in Judges 4, and today, we'll turn to the *song* that comes right after that account in Judges 5.

And that's where we are as we begin today's passage.

Scripture Reading

Let's read Judges 5:1-31.

¹ Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day:

² "That the leaders took the lead in Israel,
that the people offered themselves willingly,
bless the LORD!

³ "Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes;
to the LORD I will sing;
I will make melody to the LORD, the God of Israel.

⁴ "LORD, when you went out from Seir,
when you marched from the region of Edom,
the earth trembled
and the heavens dropped,
yes, the clouds dropped water.

⁵ The mountains quaked before the LORD,

even Sinai before the LORD, the God of Israel.

⁶ “In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath,
in the days of Jael, the highways were abandoned,
and travelers kept to the byways.

⁷ The villagers ceased in Israel;
they ceased to be until I arose;
I, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel.

⁸ When new gods were chosen,
then war was in the gates.
Was shield or spear to be seen
among forty thousand in Israel?

⁹ My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel
who offered themselves willingly among the people.
Bless the LORD.

¹⁰ “Tell of it, you who ride on white donkeys,
you who sit on rich carpets
and you who walk by the way.

¹¹ 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.

¹² “Awake, awake, Deborah!
Awake, awake, break out in a song!
Arise, Barak, lead away your captives,
O son of Abinoam.

¹³ Then down marched the remnant of the noble;
the people of the LORD marched down for me against the mighty.

¹⁴ From Ephraim their root they marched down into the valley,
following you, Benjamin, with your kinsmen;
from Machir marched down the commanders,
and from Zebulun those who bear the lieutenant's staff;

¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ Zebulun is a people who risked their lives to the death;
Naphtali, too, on the heights of the field.

¹⁹ “The kings came, they fought;
then fought the kings of Canaan,
at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo;
they got no spoils of silver.

²⁰ From heaven the stars fought,
from their courses they fought against Sisera.

²¹ The torrent Kishon swept them away,
the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon.
March on, my soul, with might!

- ²² “Then loud beat the horses’ hoofs
with the galloping, galloping of his steeds.
- ²³ “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.
- ²⁴ “Most blessed of women be Jael,
the wife of Heber the Kenite,
of tent-dwelling women most blessed.
- ²⁵ He asked for water and she gave him milk;
she brought him curds in a noble’s bowl.
- ²⁶ She sent her hand to the tent peg
and her right hand to the workmen’s mallet;
she struck Sisera;
she crushed his head;
she shattered and pierced his temple.
- ²⁷ Between her feet
he sank, he fell, he lay still;
between her feet
he sank, he fell;
where he sank,
there he fell—dead.
- ²⁸ “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?’
- ²⁹ Her wisest princesses answer,
indeed, she answers herself,
- ³⁰ ‘Have they not found and divided the spoil?—
A womb 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?’
- ³¹ “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.

This is God’s Word.

Overview

We’ll look at this passage in three parts.

- I. The Lord causes his people to sing (1-3, 9-11) [which is generally in the *beginning* part of the song]
- II. The Lord calls his people to be united in battle (6-8, 12-18, 23) [which is generally in the *middle* part of the song]
- III. The Lord crushes his enemies and fights for his friends (4-5, 19-22, 24-31) [which is generally in the *end* part of the song]

I. The Lord causes his people to sing (1-3, 9-11)

Look at verses 1-3.

[¹ Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day:

² “That the leaders took the lead in Israel,
that the people offered themselves willingly,
bless the LORD!

³ “Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes;
to the LORD I will sing;
I will make melody to the LORD, the God of Israel.]

Deborah, as a *prophetess*, is likely the main composer of this inspired song. Her name is mentioned first in verse 1 and later in verse 7, the first-person pronoun “I” refers to Deborah.

But we know that the song is not just for *Deborah* to sing, but it’s composed for *all* the people of Israel to sing.

In verse 1, *both* Deborah and Barak *lead* the people of Israel to sing this song *together*.

Verse 2 calls the people to “bless the LORD,” which is a call to worship. It’s an exhortation for the people to *bless* (or *praise*) the Lord!

And then, in verse 3, in response to that call to worship, each individual in the congregation makes a conscious choice and commitment to *sing* before all the kings of the nations—or before the entire world—saying, “I *will* sing; I *will* make melody to the LORD, the God of Israel.”

<pause>

We should notice that this is the *only* song in the *entire* book of Judges, and it’s the *highest* point in a book that is characterized by an overall downward spiral pattern, where things seem to go from bad to worse.

So the fact that there is a *song* in this book at all is very *unexpected*.

So the natural question is: *Why* is this here in this book?

In the big picture, it shows us that, even in the midst of a downward spiral—even when all seems to be going from bad to worse—God’s people *can* still sing.

Think of the lyrics of that song that we sometimes sing—“How Can I Keep From Singing?”

I can sing in the troubled times
Sing when I win
I can sing when I lose my step
And fall down again
I can sing 'cause You pick me up
Sing 'cause You're there
I can sing 'cause You hear me Lord
When I call to You in prayer
I can sing with my last breath
Sing for I know
That I'll sing with the angels
And the saints around the throne

No matter what we’re going through, God’s people can always *sing* because we always have the *Lord*.

<pause>

Now, more specifically, what was *their* reason for singing here?

Look at verse 1. It says, “*Then* sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam *on that day*.”

What does “that day” refer to?

Look back to...

Judges 4:14, 23 = And Deborah said to Barak, “Up! For **this is the day** in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the Lord go out before you?” ... So **on that day** God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan before the people of Israel.

So after being oppressed cruelly by Jabin king of Canaan and his commander Sisera for 20 years, “on that day,” the Lord defeated them suddenly and swiftly—and for the first time in 20 years, the people of Israel were liberated, delivered, saved.

That’s why they sang. It was the natural and proper response for experiencing such a great salvation.

How could they *not* burst out singing?

<pause>

And then, look at verse 9.

[⁹ My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel
who offered themselves willingly among the people.
Bless the LORD.

¹⁰ “Tell of it, you who ride on white donkeys,
you who sit on rich carpets
and you who walk by the way.

¹¹ 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.]

It’s very similar to verse 2. It’s another call to worship, exhorting the people to “bless the LORD.”

And verses 10-11 give us the *who*, *how*, *what*, and *where* of blessing the Lord.

Who should bless the Lord? The *rich* (“you who rise on white donkeys, you who sit on rich carpets”) and the *poor* (“you who walk by the way”)—and everyone in between.

How should they bless the Lord? By *singing* (“to the sound of musicians”).

What should be the content of their praise to the Lord? They should sing about “the righteous triumphs of the LORD,” particularly the great salvation they experienced over the Canaanites on *that* day.

Where should they sing and tell of the Lord’s righteous triumphs? At the “watering place” and “the gates,” which were public places where the people gathered. So, whenever they gathered together, the people of Israel were to sing out these praises to the Lord who had delivered them.

<pause>

Now, singing is not a new thing for God’s people, but we see God’s people singing all throughout Scripture.

After being delivered from slavery in Egypt, and after the Lord drowned Pharaoh and his armies and chariots in the Red Sea, Moses and Miriam lead God’s people to sing to the Lord in Exodus 15.

When the Lord delivered David from his enemies and from Saul, he sang to the Lord in 2 Samuel 22.

The entire book of Psalms is essentially a song book of 150 songs for God’s people to sing to the Lord in worship, giving them a song for any state of their soul that they may find themselves in.

The Song of Songs is another whole book in the Old Testament, known to be the greatest of songs because of its depiction of covenant love.

Anticipating God's coming justice and salvation, God's people are given a song to sing on that day in Isaiah 26.

And in Revelation 5 and 15, on that final day, when all the redeemed are delivered from final judgment, all of God's people will sing a "new song" in worship of our Lord and Savior.

Singing *has* always and *will* always characterize God's people because *who* our God is and *what* he has done for us never ceases to *cause* us to sing!

<pause>

Still, perhaps we're hesitant to sing, or we don't feel gifted at singing, or we just don't feel like singing. What then?

Let me offer three quick reasons or encouragements for us to sing as God's people.

First, we sing to teach.

In verses 10 and 11, God's people are commanded to *tell* of "the righteous triumphs of the LORD" in the context of *songs*.

Also, don't forget that the *entire* chapter is itself a song. And even as we're expounding this song right now in this sermon, it is *teaching* us things that are important for us as God's people.

But if we skim through the content of this song, we'll quickly realize that some of the content of this song makes us a bit uncomfortable.

- In verses 6-7, it describes the oppression that they experienced.
- In verse 8, it owns up to their own idolatry as the reason for their dire circumstances.
- In verses 2, 9, 13-15, and 18, it praises God for faithful leaders and willing members to fight together.
- In verses 15-17, it addresses disappointment with unfaithful members unwilling to help.
- In verse 23, it communicates God's curse over a certain town.
- In verses 19-22 and 24-27, it deals with God's judgment over his enemies with vivid imagery.
- In verses 28-30, it depicts the empty hope and corrupt mind of someone who doesn't know the Lord.
- And in verse 31, it warns God's enemies and comforts God's friends.

Unfortunately, it's difficult to find many songs these days that address these biblical themes, and I think that's one of the reasons that many in our generation don't know that the Bible teaches these things.

Colossians 3:16: Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, **teaching** and admonishing one another in all wisdom, **singing** psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

How are we to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly? By "teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom," and "singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."

The teaching and singing to one another are means by which biblical truth is *expressed* and *impressed* upon our hearts more deeply.

And these are not necessarily two separate things. Singing is for teaching. Praise is for instruction. Adoration is for admonishing.

So we don't just want to sing happy songs, or songs that we like or are comfortable with, but we want to sing songs that will *teach* us the wide range of biblical truth that we need to know, that will equip us to have a song to sing no matter what we're going through.

Kids, I want to especially encourage you to *think* about the songs that we sing at church. They may sound very different from the songs you listen to on your own—and if you ever listened to Linkin Park, you'll know that it's *very* different than the music that I listened to growing up—but take note of biblical truths that these songs teach and sing *loudly*.

Good songs don't just have a good *tune*, but they are rich in *truth*—and you will be glad that you have that truth accessible to you through these songs later on in life.

Second, we sing to remember.

On your deathbed, I doubt you will remember this sermon or any other sermon, but you'll probably remember a song.

For some reason, God has made words connected to music resonate more deeply in our hearts and minds and memories than mere words.

When we sing songs that teach us a wide range of biblical truth, and we sing them week-in and week-out for however many years the Lord gives us life on this earth, then later on, if you just hum the tune, you'll remember the words.

When Paul and Silas were in prison (Acts 16:25), they had no song books with them, but they both had songs etched into their hearts, which they could both remember and sing to encourage their own souls and one another.

On the night Jesus was to be betrayed and later crucified—on his deathbed (so to speak)—he sang a song with his disciples and then left for the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:30).

When you find yourself down or discouraged, when you can't remember verses or sermons, or when your memory begins to fade due to the effects of aging, you will be glad to have such a rich storehouse of scripturally saturated songs to call to mind to encourage you and those around you.

[JKT only: That's one of the reasons that we encourage you to take home the service guides and use them to sing throughout the week. The more we sing these songs, the more familiar we will be of them, and the more we can remember the truths they express in times of need.]

Third, we sing to build unity.

There is something powerfully unifying about singing these biblical truths that we hold deeply in our souls alongside other people who also deeply hold them.

Think of what it was like for the people of Israel to hear each of them sing out in one voice: "I *will* sing; I *will* make melody to the LORD."

It reinforces the foundation of our unity. We're not united around ethnicity, nationality, personality, education, vocation, or any other common interest, but we are united around our common faith in the same biblical truths that we sing about.

In fact, when you're going through *conflicts* with fellow brothers and sisters, think about all the things you have in *common* with them as you sing these songs together—all the deep *convictions* that you share together—and often the misunderstandings and disagreements will not vanish but will be put into perspective.

If we're in Christ, then we're on Team Jesus, and we sing the same national anthem (so to speak) as fellow citizens in the kingdom of God.

<pause>

And this last reason or encouragement to sing as God's people transitions us nicely to our next point.

So first, the Lord causes his people to sing; and second...

II. The Lord calls his people to be united in battle (6-8, 12-18, 23)

Look at verse 6-8.

[⁶ "In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath,
in the days of Jael, the highways were abandoned,
and travelers kept to the byways.
⁷ The villagers ceased in Israel;
they ceased to be until I arose;
I, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel.
⁸ When new gods were chosen,
then war was in the gates.
Was shield or spear to be seen
among forty thousand in Israel?]

It describes what it was like for the people of Israel to be under Canaanite oppression for those 20 years.

In verse 6, it says, "the highways were abandoned, and travelers kept to the byways [or the side paths off the main road]."

So they were fearful and cut off from fellow Israelites in other villages.

In verse 7, it says, "the villagers ceased in Israel."

The life they lived in the villages ceased to really be called "life" at all.

In verse 8, it asks rhetorically, "Was shield or spear to be seen among forty thousand in Israel?"

And the answer is, of course, no.

There's no way the Canaanites would've allowed the Israelites to have weapons to fight them with. And without proper weapons, there was little hope that they could ever organize a successful uprising against the Canaanites.

So under Canaanite rule, Israel was in this fearful, isolated, lifeless, hopeless state.

<pause>

But *why* were the people of Israel in this situation to begin with?

Look at verse 8: "When new gods were chosen, then war was in the gates."

This is part of the downward spiral that they kept repeating in the book of Judges.

- Israel *rebelled* against the Lord by turning to *idolatry*—by choosing new gods for themselves;
- and as a result, the Lord *handed* them over to their *enemies* as an act of *discipline*—he brought war to their gates.

But verse 7 says that everything began to change when Deborah the *prophetess* arose as a "mother in Israel."

A mother brings life and nourishment, and that's what Deborah did for the people of Israel.

How? By bringing the word of God.

Look at verses 12-13.

[¹² “Awake, awake, Deborah!
 Awake, awake, break out in a song!
 Arise, Barak, lead away your captives,
 O son of Abinoam.
¹³ Then down marched the remnant of the noble;
 the people of the LORD marched down for me against the mighty.]

Here, the song begins to replay the events in Judges 4 in poetic form.

In verse 12, Deborah is called to *awake* as a prophetess to speak God’s Word, and Barak is called to *arise* to lead the people in battle, assuring him of victory.

And in verse 13, the people of Israel begin to gather in preparation for battle against the Canaanites.

From the narrative in chapter 4, we know that Barak makes a *call* to arms, and here, in verses 14-18, it records how the various tribes *responded* to Barak’s call to join them in battle against the Canaanites.

Look at verse 14 to the beginning of verse 15—and verse 18.

[¹⁴ From Ephraim their root they marched down into the valley,
 following you, Benjamin, with your kinsmen;
 from Machir marched down the commanders,
 and from Zebulun those who bear the lieutenant’s staff;
¹⁵ the princes of Issachar came with Deborah,
 and Issachar faithful to Barak;
 into the valley they rushed at his heels....
¹⁸ Zebulun is a people who risked their lives to the death;
 Naphtali, too, on the heights of the field.]

These are the tribes who *answered* the call and joined them in battle.

Ephraim (which was Deborah’s tribe), Benjamin, Machir (which was western Manasseh), Zebulun, Issachar, and Naphtali (which was Barak’s tribe) all came out to fight alongside one another against the Canaanites.

This is an army consisting of five-and-a-half tribes, and this is the closest thing to an “all Israelite” coalition in the entire book of Judges, where they’re fighting their enemies together.¹

But sadly, not all the tribes answered the call, and this song calls out those who chose *not* to join and *rebukes* them for it.

Look at the rest of verse 15 to verse 17.

[Among the clans of Reuben
 there were great searchings of heart.
¹⁶ 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.]

¹ By the end of the book, there will be an “all Israelite” coalition where they fight against one of their *own* tribes—Benjamin—and nearly wipe out that tribe. But that’s when they’re uniting and acting more like pagans than the people of God. From Judges 4, it only mentions that 10,000 men from Zebulun and Naphtali answered Barak’s call, but just because the other tribes were not mentioned in the narrative does not mean that they were not called. This song in chapter 5 gives more information, letting us know that Barak’s call to arms went out widely to the *other* tribes of Israel as well—and the expectation was that the other tribes would join together in the fight. Zebulun and Naphtali are given special notice here in verse 18, where they’re set apart and named *after* those who did *not* answer the call are named. And if the “forty thousand” in verse 8 represents *all* those who answered the call to arms, then the fact that these two relatively obscure tribes contributed 10,000 men (or one-fourth of the army) to “risk their lives to the death” is quite amazing.

¹⁷ 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.]

In verse 15 and 16, it says that Reuben was a tribe where “there were great searchings of heart,” meaning that they really *contemplated* whether or not to join the battle, but in the end, they decided to just sit still among their flocks and *not* join their fellow Israelites.

In verse 17, Gilead (which was Gad and eastern Manasseh) stayed on their side of the Jordan River, choosing *not* to get involved; and Dan decided just to keep working on their ships, choosing *not* to be bothered by the concerns of their fellow Israelites; and Asher just sat still as well, staying put where they were.

So four-and-a-half tribes decided *not* to answer Barak’s call to arms to join the battle²—and this song asks them piercing questions: “Why did you sit still among the sheepfolds? Why did he stay with the ships?”

These are rhetorical questions because there was no good reason for them to stay put. They were *expected* to join the rest of their fellow Israelites and fight alongside them, so this was a sharp *rebuke* against those tribes who *refused* to join God’s people in battle.

And to *emphasize* how *wrong* this was for them *not* to join, look at verse 23.

[²³ “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.]

Meroz was not a tribe but probably an Israelite town because it had “inhabitants.”

For them, the angel of the LORD appears, and he speaks on behalf of the LORD to *curse* that town “thoroughly.”

Why? “Because they did not come to the help of the LORD.”³

It wasn’t just that they didn’t answer *Barak’s* call, but they did not answer the *LORD’s* call, since it was the word of God that *commanded* Barak to gather the people of Israel to fight as one.

It’s not that the Lord needs any of our help—he doesn’t, and that will be very clear in the next part—but what brings the Lord glory is when his people are *united* around his word and *united* in battle.

<pause>

Now, as God’s people on this side of redemptive history, our battle is *not* against flesh and blood—we’re not engaging in *physical* battle against other people—but we engage in a *spiritual* battle against our sinful thoughts and desires, the temptations of this world, and the schemes of the evil one (Eph. 5:12).

And just like God’s people in the Old Testament, the Lord calls *us* to be united in this spiritual battle.

It’s not everyone for themselves, but we’re called to help one another hold up their shield of faith, which can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one, and to wield their sword, which is the word of God (Eph. 5:16-17).

² The tribes of Judah and Simeon are not mentioned among either those who answered the call or those who did not.

³ Since this town is mentioned *after* the description of the battle in verses 19-22, perhaps they were located in a place where they could’ve come out to cut off the fleeing Canaanites, like the Israelites did when they cut off the Moabites at the fords of the Jordan River in a previous account (3:28)—but they didn’t help at all. This was especially heinous because they were presumably in an obvious position to help, but they did nothing. This was a sin of omission in one of the most blatant of ways.

We're called to help one another kill our sin and to take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

We're called to help one another to be alert and to resist the devil (1 Pet. 5:8-9; James 4:7).

We're called to exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of [us] may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:13).

And we're called to fight alongside one another in this spiritual battle, *knowing* and *trusting* that God has *already* "disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in [Christ]" (Col. 2:15).

<pause>

In a word, what is all this referring to? *Discipling*.

The way that we engage in this spiritual battle together is by *discipling* one another—by intentionally helping one another in our followership of Christ, by helping each other hold fast to God's word amidst everything in us and around us that would try to derail us.

At any given time, there are people in the church who are...

- doubting God's goodness,
- giving into sexual immorality, or drunkenness, or anger, or self-harm,
- trying to find meaning and significance in the things that they do,
- feeling alone and disconnected with others,
- struggling in their marriage or in their singleness,
- rationalizing their sinful choices as understandable,
- neglecting their responsibilities in the home,
- avoiding the regular gathering of God's people,
- allowing the world to shape their thinking of what is "normal" or "expected,"
- falling into cycles of complaining and blaming and thinking the worst,
- and on and on.

I'm *not* exaggerating. These are *real* conversations that I've had at various times in the church.

Now, even as you hear this, what is your initial response?

Is it "Oh wow, I feel so bad; that must be really hard for them... but I have my own problems to deal with"—and then you do nothing?

Or is it "How can I come alongside them to help them persevere in their faith?"—and you pursue them?

The *first* response is what the Lord *rebukes* and even *curses* in Judges 5.

Reuben seriously considered doing something—"there were great searchings of heart"—but in the end, they did nothing. Others were too busy with work or whatever else was going on in their lives; they couldn't be bothered to help their fellow brothers and sisters.

But the *second* response is what the Lord *praises* and *commends* in Judges 5.

Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir (or western Manasseh), Zebulun, Issachar, Naphtali—they all marched down, they rushed, they were willing to risk their lives to death for their fellow brothers and sisters.

The *first* response makes a lot of sense in the eyes of the world, but it is completely contrary to who our Lord and Savior is.

The *second* response doesn't make any sense in the eyes of the world, but it images our Lord and Savior accurately to each other and the rest of the world.

It delights our Lord and brings him glory when his people are united around his word and helping each other hold fast to his word amidst this spiritual battle together.

<pause>

Now, in order to really understand this, we need to understand that, at the most fundamental level, to be a Christian is to now identify yourself with the Lord's *people*.

You were not simply saved as an *individual* and left to think as an *individual*, but you were saved into the Lord's *people* and now your mindset has radically changed to be thinking not in terms of "what will benefit *me*?" but "what will benefit the Lord's *people*?"

There are so many passages that we could turn to for this, but one that comes to mind is...

1 Peter 2:9-10: But you are a chosen *race*, a royal *priesthood*, a holy *nation*, a *people* for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a *people*, but now you are God's *people*; once you had not received *mercy*, but now you have received *mercy*.

Every reference here is in the *plural*.

And that last portion is *parallel*—those who did *not* receive mercy were *not* God's people, and those who *received* mercy *became* God's people.

In other words, in the process of becoming a Christian ("receiving mercy"), I am united to a *family*.

In conversion, the "I" becomes a "we."

In conversion, it means that I'm now a brother, a sister, a son, a daughter. I now see myself in relation to the *rest* of the family.

That means that my entire life as a Christian should be *church-shaped*.⁴

When we look at Scripture, there is no other paradigm for the Christian life.

As Christians, we cannot help but to think about how we can help our fellow brothers and sisters in their followership of Christ—to persevere in this spiritual battle and make it together to the end.

That's an *essential* part of what it means to be a *Christian*.

<pause>

So first, the Lord causes his people to sing; second, the Lord calls his people to be united in battle; and third...

III. The Lord crushes his enemies and fights for his friends (4-5, 19-22, 24-31)

Look at verse 19.

[¹⁹ "The kings came, they fought;
then fought the kings of Canaan,
at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo;
they got no spoils of silver.]

This describes the battle against the Canaanites, and how the Canaanites did *not* win ("they got no spoils of silver").

⁴ Jonathan Leeman in "Conversations on Church-Centered Missions with Jonathan Leeman," June 5, 2025, <https://youtu.be/xi1bmKzTXdw?si=VP4iygoftkBFIAUb>.

But remember, the Canaanites had 900 chariots of iron, which were like tanks in the ancient near east, and they had been cruelly oppressing the Israelites for 20 years. There wasn't even a shield or spear to be found among the Israelites.

So how in the world could the Israelites have defeated the mightier Canaanites?

In chapter 4, it says that the LORD "routed" or threw the Canaanites into a panic (4:15).

Now, here in chapter 5, we're given more detail as to how exactly the Lord led and fought for his people.

Look at verses 4-5.

[⁴ "LORD, when you went out from Seir,
when you marched from the region of Edom,
the earth trembled
and the heavens dropped,
yes, the clouds dropped water.
⁵ The mountains quaked before the LORD,
even Sinai before the LORD, the God of Israel.]

The Lord, here, is pictured as making himself manifest or visible through this great storm, like he did when he met his people at Sinai amidst a thick cloud with frightening thunder and lightning and where the whole mountain trembled (Exod. 19:16-20).

The Lord went out riding on this great storm (so to speak) moving visibly from the south to the place of the battle.

But the Lord didn't come alone.

Look at verse 20.

[²⁰ From heaven the stars fought,
from their courses they fought against Sisera.
²¹ The torrent Kishon swept them away,
the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon.
March on, my soul, with might!

²² "Then loud beat the horses' hoofs
with the galloping, galloping of his steeds.]

The Lord came with the "stars" and fought against Sisera's army.

The "stars," along with the sun and moon, are a reference to the angelic "host [or armies] of heaven" (Deut. 4:19).

And coming out in a great storm, the LORD, in verse 21, pours out heavy rain and basically floods the Kishon River.

<pause>

Just imagine being an Israelite soldier in Barak's army for a moment.

After hearing Deborah's prophetic assurance of victory—that "this is the day in which the LORD has given into your hand" (4:14)—you rush down Mount Tabor with Barak and the rest of the army, but you're filled with fear as you know that 900 chariots of iron are waiting for you at the bottom.

But as you're charging down the mountain, you see the skies suddenly darken and a great storm quickly approaches from the south—from Edom—and then, like a smart bomb, the thick clouds break open and drop their payload of flooding rain right on the Kishon River.⁵

And within minutes, in verse 21, all the shallow, slow-moving streams of the Kishon rapidly swell with the heavy rain, turning it in a dangerous *torrent*—or a strong, fast-moving stream—suddenly flooding and muddying the battlefield.

And of course, those 900 chariots of iron then become a liability—they're rendered useless—in flooding water and with mud bogging down their wheels.

And so, in verse 22, by the time you reach the battlefield, you see the Canaanite horses of the chariots panicking and retreating.

And so, you, along with the Israelite army, *pursue* the Canaanite chariots and army and completely destroy them, so that “not a man was left” (4:16).

You were facing certain death coming down the mountain, but “on *that* day,” the Lord had gone out before you with all his heavenly host and crushed a mightier army that would have slaughtered you on any *other* day.⁶

<pause>

So the Israelites have won the battle, but just like the narrative in chapter 4, it follows up the battle by telling us what happened to the enemy commander *Sisera* after he left his chariot and fled from the battle.

Look at verses 24-27.

[²⁴ “Most blessed of women be Jael,
the wife of Heber the Kenite,
of tent-dwelling women most blessed.
²⁵ He asked for water and she gave him milk;
she brought him curds in a noble's bowl.
²⁶ She sent her hand to the tent peg
and her right hand to the workmen's mallet;
she struck Sisera;
she crushed his head;
she shattered and pierced his temple.
²⁷ Between her feet
he sank, he fell, he lay still;
between her feet
he sank, he fell;
where he sank,
there he fell—dead.]

There aren't really any new details given here; we know all this from the narrative account. But now, the song is describing Jael's killing of Sisera in poetic slow motion.

In verse 26, she takes a tent peg in her left hand, and she takes a mallet (or a hammer) in her right hand, and then with quick succession of verbs, it gives us a picture of Jael *hammering* the tent peg into his temple—she struck, she crushed, she shattered, she pierced.

⁵ Barry G. Webb, *Judges and Ruth: God in Chaos*, PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

⁶ It's interesting to note *how* the Lord did this. To the Canaanites, Baal was the powerful storm god who controlled the weather. And they worshipped the sun, moon, and stars. But here, we find that it is the *Lord* who rides the storm and controls the weather—not Baal. It is the *Lord* who leads the “stars” (his heavenly host). The Lord is not a *tribal* god, but he is the *only* God who created the heavens and the earth and reigns over all of creation. If Baal or these other false Canaanite gods can even be called “gods” at all, then compared to the *Lord*, like Hulk calls Loki after smashing him in The Avengers movie, they're just “puny gods.”

And in verse 27, it's the slow-motion death of Sisera as his body goes limp and lifeless—he sank, he fell, he lay still. It repeats it again, and finally he was dead.

<pause>

Then, the scene shifts to the mother of Sisera waiting for her son to return from battle.

Look at verses 28-30.

[²⁸ “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?’
²⁹ Her wisest princesses answer,
indeed, she answers herself,
³⁰ ‘Have they not found and divided the spoil?—
A womb 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?’”]

In verse 28, the mother of Sisera is worried and wailing, wondering why her son has not returned from the battle yet.

In some sense, we can empathize with her mother's heart, but then, in verse 29-30, you hear what the “wisest princesses” say, and what she says to herself, for comfort.

They tell themselves that Sisera and the Canaanite army are just dividing the spoil (or plunder, or stolen goods) of the battle. And what is that spoil?

“A womb or two for every man.” The mother of Sisera assumes that her son and the soldiers are busy *violating* the Israelite women, and *that's* why it's taking them so long to return.

It's rather disturbing that this “mother” can talk about other women in this way. Such was the wickedness of not only the Canaanite *men* but even down to their *mothers*.

And then, she goes on to expect that her son will bring back beautiful clothes and accessories for her and the other Canaanite women.

But we and all the singers of Israel know that all of this is just *empty* hope because the reality is that her son and all the Canaanite soldiers have been killed.⁷

And then, look at verse 31.

[³¹ “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.]

“So may all your enemies perish, O LORD!”

This is not just referring to the mother of Sisera, but this is the conclusion of the *entire* song.

The way the Lord *defeated* the Canaanite army so that “not a man was left” (4:16), the way the Lord *crushed* the head of Sisera, may *all* of the Lord's enemies perish like that.

“*But* your friends be like the sun as he rises in his might.”

⁷ The *mother* of Sisera serves as a *contrast* to Deborah, “a *mother* in Israel.” The mother of Sisera wails; Deborah sings. The mother of Sisera has a son who is dead; Deborah has a “son” (Israel, so to speak) who has been given new life. The mother of Sisera comforts herself with empty hope; Deborah pronounces true comfort in God's Word.

Like the sun that rises in his might each morning, “[those] who wait for the LORD [who trust in the LORD] shall renew their strength” (Isa. 40:31).

And that marks the end of the song.

And then, there’s the epilogue that we’ve come to expect in each judge cycle—“And the land had rest for forty years.”

<pause>

Notice the absolute contrast that is stated at the *end* of the song and that is portrayed *throughout*.

You are either the Lord’s *enemy*, or you are the Lord’s *friend*.

Those who are his *enemies*, the Lord will crush, and they will perish.

Those who are his *friends*, the Lord will fight for, and they will have rest.

So those are the *only* two categories—we are either the Lord’s *enemy* or the Lord’s *friend*—and whether we are his enemy or friend has *real, eternal* consequences.

On the final day of judgment, the Lord Jesus will return as the conquering King with his heavenly armies. He will crush his *enemies* so that they are no more, and he will wipe away every tear from the eyes of his *friends* and give them *eternal* rest in the new heavens and new earth.

So the question we should ask ourselves is this: Am I the Lord’s *enemy*, or am I his *friend*?

<pause>

I’m sure that most of us would like to say that we are the Lord’s friend. After all, we’re here in this church gathering *singing* songs to him and *listening* to his word preached.

But when we look at Judges 5, what seems to *separate* the Lord’s enemies from his friends are what they’re *hoping* in.

Sisera and the Canaanites hoped in chariots and horses, but the people of God hoped in the Lord (Ps. 20:7).

The mother of Sisera hoped in empty words of comfort, but the people of God hoped in the sure word of God.

So what do *you* put your hope in?

<pause>

If you’re not a believer, we’re glad that you’re here, and before you leave today, we want the hope of the gospel (or good news) of Jesus Christ to be crystal clear to you.

The reality is that, because of our sins against God, we are all by default the Lord’s *enemy* (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21; James 4:4; Eph. 2:1-3). We all rightfully deserved death and hell because of our sins against him.

But... “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not *perish* but have eternal *life*” (John 3:16).

The good news is that the Lord himself came as the person of Jesus Christ to fight for us and do what we could never do ourselves. He lived the perfect life that we were supposed to live, he was crushed in our place for our sins on the cross, and he resurrected three days later, so that all who repent of their sins and believe in him as Lord and Savior will not perish but have eternal life.

That's how the Lord makes his enemies his friends.

If we turn away from our sins and trust wholly in Christ for life and salvation, then he now calls us his friends (John 15:15). I pray that you would trust him and become his friend today.

Conclusion

We've spent a lot of time looking up close at this song of deliverance, so as we close, let's get a bird's eye view of everything we talked about.

First, the Lord causes his people to sing—and so, we have a great *God* to sing *to*.

Second, the Lord calls his people to be united in battle—and so, we have a great *family* to sing *with*.

And third, the Lord crushes his enemies and fights for his friends—and so, we have a great *salvation* to sing *about*.

When we truly understand and believe these glorious truths, then like the saints of old, our hearts will also be *bursting* to praise our God.

Let's pray.