**Deborah**

Aristotle wrote that nature abhors a vacuum. While Aristotle is most commonly known as a philosopher, he was also well versed in the physical sciences. He believed that a vacuum could not exist because denser material would fill the void (our cats also abhor a vacuum but for an entirely different reason). While I cannot comment on the science behind this, I have observed this phenomenon at work in my banking career. When a leader abdicates responsibility, there is usually someone willing, even eager to fill the void. The results have been mixed as usurpers are often more interested in self aggrandizement than accomplishing goals for the company. Our study of Judges chapters 4&5 reveal that God abhors a vacuum as well and that He will fill a void in leadership to accomplish His purposes.

The chapter begins with the statement that the Israelites once again did evil in the eyes of the Lord so God sold them into the hands of Jabin, king of Hazor who oppressed them for 20 years after which they cried out to the Lord. This is a repeat of what we read in the previous chapter, the only differences were the name of the king and the time of oppression (see chapter 3 verses 7-8). We will read of further similar accounts in the coming chapters of Judges. A prophetess named Deborah was leading Israel during this time. She held court in the land of Ephraim between Ramah and Bethel, settling disputes of fellow Jews who presumably came from lands of all the tribes. Since she was a prophetess, she also was privy to what God chose to reveal to her making her a spiritual leader as well as a governing leader. She sent a message from God to Barak who lived in Naphtali commanding him to assemble an army of 10,000 men from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulon. God said that He would lure Jabin’s army under the command of Sisera to the Kishon River where He would deliver them into the hands of Barak’s army.

Barak replied to *Deborah* that he would agree to go only if she went with him. Deborah said that she would go with Barak but that the honor of victory would belong to her rather than Barak. In verse 11 we learn that a Kenite named Heber had left his relatives and settled near Kedesh. The Kenites were descendants of Hobab, the brother in law of Moses (see Num. 10:29-32). Deborah told Barak to attack Sisera because God had gone ahead of him. God defeated Sisera’s entire army through the swords of the men led by Barak but Sisera escaped to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber. The seemingly out of place verse 11 is cleared up as Jael invited Sisera into her tent where she killed him by driving a spike into his head. At the close of the chapter Jabin was completely destroyed.

Chapter 5 is the song sung by Deborah and Barak after Jabin was defeated. It is reminiscent of the song sung by Miriam after the defeat of Pharaoh’s army (see Ex. chapter 15). The song begins with “When the princes in Israel take the lead and the people offer themselves” (NIV). The KJV is much different: Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel”. Verse 3 is similar in both versions where Deborah tells **kings** and **rulers** that she will sing to the Lord. Verses 4 & 5 tell how God went out from Seir, recalling the victories in which He led the Israelites against kings in Moab (see Num. chapter 21). Verses 6-8 describe how they were oppressed by Jabin and how they had turned away from God towards other Gods. In verses 11-15 and 18 the people awaken and summon Deborah and Barak who are joined by men from the tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin, Zebulon and Issachar (Makir refers to the half tribe of Manasseh east of the Jordan). The tribes of Reuben, Manasseh (east), Dan and Asher are shamed in verses 15-17 for their refusal to join in the battle. Verses 19-22 describe the defeat of Sisera and verse 23 tells of a town named Meroz which did not come to the aid of the Israelites. In verses 24-27 Jael is praised because she killed Sisera. Verses 28-30 mock the family of Sisera for assuming their army was long in returning from the battle because they were plundering the Israelites. The chapter ends with praise to God and noting the land had peace for 40 years.

These chapters are significant because they feature the bold actions of 2 women. Jael was willing to risk her life as her husband apparently stood by and Deborah stepped in to lead the Israelites when Barak was unwilling to go alone. On a larger scale, Deborah was the spiritual leader of Israel in the absence of a man unwilling or unqualified to lead. God will always find a substitute if the one He calls does not respond. I am reminded of the phrase “Lead, follow or get out of the way”. In the modern church, it sometimes seems that the most vocal critics are the ones who participate the lease in kingdom business. What will God call you to do in 2024 and how will you respond?