

Home Group study: week beginning 11th October 2020

Flawed Heroes — Total War

What is your favourite film? What elements make a really good film plot?

Read: Judges 4: 1-24

Discovery

If you read a lot of the history revealed in the Old Testament, v1 will be depressingly familiar to you. Depending on whether their leader was a godly person or not, the Israelites swing from living God's way to 'doing evil in the eyes of the Lord'. Every time they do this, things go badly for them. Read Judges 2: 1-3; does this give a reason why they keep going round this circle? (In chapter 1 we read that the tribes of Israel start off obeying God in driving out the Canaanite people before they move in, and then they become increasingly lax about it.)

What has been the effect on Israel of doing evil in the sight of the Lord this time?

What is the plan for rescuing Israel (verses 6-7)? Where has this detailed plan come from?

In verse 8 Barak puts a condition on him following the plan. What is the condition?

Why do you think he would make such a condition? How does his insistence on not following the God's plan exactly affect the outcome?

What military advantage does Sisera (commander of the oppressing Canaanite army) hold (v13)? In verse 15 Sisera's army face defeat; is this the outcome of Israel's superior might?

In chapter 5, Deborah and Barak sing a victory song; verses 4 and 20-21 give an indication of how the course of the battle was changed. What do they suggest? Can you think of more recent times when weather miraculously changed the events in a war? Do you think God was behind that?

In Chapter 4: 17, Sisera runs off and thinks he reaches safety. What happens?

How does God fulfil his word through Deborah to Barak in v9? What does that teach us about the way God wants us to respond to him?

Understanding

Israel is in a mess due to its disobedience to God. What does verse 2 tell us about the way God deals with His people when they reject him? Can we relate this to our world today?

Why did God suddenly start working to restore Israel (v3)? Is this an answer to the state of our world today?

Do we find it surprising that the leader of Israel at this time was a woman?

Does this change our understanding of the biblical role of women? The other major character in this story, Jael, is also a woman: and apparently not a believer either.

In what ways does she fulfil God's purposes? Does that suggest that God can use anybody He chooses to fulfil His purposes? What does that mean for us?

Application

Dave drew four conclusions in his sermon:

1. **Keep pure.** Israel hadn't and they were under oppression as a result.

Can you remember what Dave said were the two 'false gods' that Israel particularly adopted from Canaan and what each of them stood for? Are they still a stumbling block to us today? How should we 'keep pure'?

2. **Work together.** Despite Barak's insistence on changing the rules, he and Deborah otherwise work together according to God's plan, each bringing their particular gifting: military command in Barak's case and prophecy and diplomacy in Deborah's. What gifts do members of the group have? What gifts do we see across our church? What would be the effect of us all using our gifts in one big collaborative effort? How could we draw our gifts together?

3. **Trust God.** Jael becomes part of the plan, to fulfil the part of it that is denied to Barak by his reluctance to trust God fully. That plan is fulfilled, by God bringing in a total outsider, and Barak loses the satisfaction of striking that final blow. Can we sympathise with Barak's reluctance to go it alone to fulfil his part of God's plan? Who ends up as the loser when we don't trust God? How can we learn to trust God fully and obey him when he wants us to do something that may well be outside our 'comfort zone'?

4. **Be bold.** Deborah and Barak put their lives on the line to be part of God's plan. These were exceptional circumstances: but in the everyday events of leading a Christian life, what things might God ask us to put on the line? What would you say to someone who feels they're inadequate, not qualified, not strong enough in the faith, to step out in faith? Could you apply your answer to your own life?

Dave summed up by saying God looks for purity, unity, trust and boldness to make a difference. What difference could we make by being pure, living in unity, trusting and being bold?