

Dependent obedience

And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go.

Judges 4:8

In this account of God's fourth deliverance of the people of Israel in the days of the judges, this answer of the chosen captain to the prophetess Deborah is typically cast in a negative light. The context could also lead us in this direction, based on Deborah's response in the next verse, where she agrees to go with Barak to the place of assembling the army, but prophesies that he will forfeit the honor of victory to a woman. Yet in Hebrews chapter 11, where the Old Testament heroes of faith are enumerated, we see Barak listed, as only one of four judges named there from the longer list in the book of Judges. What are we to make of this? Was Barak simply a coward, not willing to go to battle without a woman to lead him? We often hear this portrayal of him, even though the author of Hebrews lifts him before us as a man of faith.

Among other things, we need only take a step back and look at the rest of the heroes on the Hebrews 11 list to realize that most of these heroes of faith also had their flaws revealed in scripture. Not only is this an evidence of Biblical inspiration, but it is also an encouragement to us, who also have our flaws. Our exhortation is to see how God would still use their faith, in spite of them, to accomplish His will and glorify Himself.

As we view Barak in the entire context of this account, we note that he obeys the word of the Lord as prophesied by Deborah. In the face of a formidable adversary, with 900 iron chariots ready to mow down Barak and his 10,000 Israelite foot soldiers, he descended Mount Tabor into the battle, only to see the Lord come and fight for them, confound the enemy, and empower them on to victory. This does not sound like a coward. After twenty years of oppression from these Canaanite charioteers, which was brought on by the idolatrous practices of Barak's countrymen, perhaps he had good reason to want to validate Deborah's prophecy, as well as keep the word of the Lord close at hand for clear direction, which he received from her when it was time to strike, under the power of God's deliverance. This he did at variance with any expectation for him to simply run with the initial command and trust in his own ability to discern his next steps. It was evidently more important for him to affirm God's direction than to gain the honor of the victory. The conclusion of the story is that God had the honor of the victory (Judges 4:23); the woman Jael is not mentioned in Hebrews 11.

So let us glean the lessons of faith, from yet another imperfect example, and apply dependent obedience for the honor of the Lord God.