

*Exhortation***“By faith . . .”****13. Barak (Heb. 11:32)**

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**B**ARAK IS PERHAPS one of the surprises of Hebrews 11, as we do not associate the period of the judges with great examples of faith. Indeed, the account of Deborah and Barak is sandwiched between two verses telling us that “the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD” (Judg. 4:1; 6:1), at a time when punishment for idolatry had rendered road travel unsafe (5:6-8), and the administration of the land was in the hands of a woman. Against this background, Deborah’s additional role, that of a prophetess, is more readily appreciated, but God’s command is specifically for Barak: “Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with *thee* [singular] ten thousand men” (4:6). God in turn would draw Israel’s enemies to defeat there (v. 7).

Things doubtless moved slowly at first; it would take time for the call to reach Barak 100 miles away at Kedesh, for him to join Deborah, then for them both to go to Kedesh (v. 9), summon the army, and travel thirty more miles to Tabor (v. 12) for battle. Furthermore, the record makes no secret of Barak’s reluctance to be involved; despite a personal calling by God and a guarantee of victory, he is unwilling to go without Deborah (v. 8). We struggle to see faith in this, and anyone less like ‘lightning’ (as his name means) is difficult to imagine. Our impression is very much of Deborah taking the initiative, joining the army herself (v. 10), then prompting Barak into action at the right moment: “Up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee?” (v. 14). Even the inspired commentary of chapter 5 suggests that only Deborah’s presence had persuaded other tribes to join in (v. 15).

Lest we be too hard on Barak, however, let us never belittle the fact that at the point of crisis he does what is necessary and becomes the instrument of victory over God’s enemies. When he saw God’s rout of the Gentile host (4:15) then his faith “wrought with his works, and by works was . . . made perfect” (Jas. 2:22). For, not con-

tent with the Canaanites’ defeat, he chased their leader to Jael’s tent near Kedesh (vv. 17,11).

So, however reluctant Barak was to begin with, however much he needed a “mother” (5:7) in Deborah, in the final analysis he was willing to obey God’s command. Hebrews 11 attributes this willingness squarely to Barak’s faith. However much it needed kick-starting into action, faith empowered Barak to overcome the inertia that would have prevented him from ever leaving home. And faith turned him into a man who could personally pursue the Canaanite general, on foot (and alone?), for forty-odd miles, straight after a battle.

Like the Lord’s parable of the son who at first demurred to obey but afterwards repented (Mt. 21:28-31), at the critical moment Barak obeyed the Father’s will. Some Bible versions reveal that Barak thus became an example to others: “. . . Issachar *faithful to Barak*; into the valley they rushed *at his heels*” (Judg. 5:15, ESV). He wrought God’s deliverance, a type of the greater Deliverer who would “lead thy captivity captive” (5:12; cf. Eph. 4:8). Seeing Barak in this light, it is profitable to return to Hebrews 11 and surmise which acts of faith mentioned there might refer to him: “. . . Barak . . . who through faith . . . obtained promises . . . waxed [became] valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens” (Heb. 11:32-34).

Hebrews 11 is as much about works, things people do, as about faith; by faith all these people *did* something. James teaches that this is the only way our faith can be demonstrated. And there is nothing wrong with faithful deeds that are motivated by others. Our deeds of faith are no less acceptable to God when they are prompted by fellow-believers; in fact, such is positively encouraged: “let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (10:24). No matter, then, that Barak relied so heavily on Deborah’s influence; despite his feelings of inadequacy, through faith he did what was asked of him.