

**Judges 4:1 ¶ And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead.**

**Judges 4:2 And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host *was* Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles.**

**Judges 4:3 And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.**

The cycle begins again. Once Ehud died, the children of Israel again rebelled against the LORD and turned to evil. So the LORD “sold” (into slavery is the thought from the Hebrew) them to suffer under Jabin, king of Canaan who reigned in Hazor, about 18 miles northwest of the Sea of Galilee. Sisera was the captain of his army, and he lived in Harosheth of the Gentiles.

The New Bible Commentary offers the following insight about Sisera: “The name *Sisera* suggests he was the leader of a group of the so-called Sea People who, like the Philistines, had migrated to Palestine by ship from the eastern Aegean. Both the name of *Harosheth Haggoyim* (‘Harosheth of the [foreign] nations’) and its location (close to the Mediterranean coast near Mt Carmel in northwest Palestine) suggest that it was originally a settlement of these Sea People.”

This time the people suffered 20 years under the rule of this man whose army boasted 900 chariots of iron—a very formidable foe. At some point (not clear when) they began to cry out to the LORD once again for mercy.

**Judges 4:4 ¶ And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.**

**Judges 4:5 And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.**

It may be surprising to some to note that the next judge the LORD raised up in Israel was a woman named Deborah. She was the wife of Lapidoth and was known as a prophetess—a woman who is recognized as a spokesman for the LORD. This is especially unusual in a culture in which women were considered second-class citizens. The LORD has always held women in high regard. It was His established purpose, however, that men hold such positions of leadership. That He chose Deborah at that time I think is a sad commentary since it seems to imply that there was no man worthy of serving the LORD in that position at that time.

Deborah made herself available to the people under a noted palm tree between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim. The New Bible Commentary notes that it would have been between 5-12 miles north of Jerusalem. The wording implies to me that Deborah had been serving as a judge for some time before the LORD intervened to deliver Israel from the Canaanites.

**Judges 4:6** And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedeshnaphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded, *saying*, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?

**Judges 4:7** And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand.

One day Deborah sent for Barak, son of Abinoam; it seems that he was the recognized leader of the troops of Israel at that time. Evidently, the LORD had revealed to her a command He had given Barak that he had yet to obey.

When Barak arrived, she asked him point blank if the "LORD God of Israel" had not commanded him to take 10,000 men from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun and head toward mount Tabor (at the northern edge of the Jezreel Valley). She also asked if the LORD had not also told him that He would deliver Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and army into the hands of the troops he led.

Her information was specific, and Barak could not deny that what she said was true.

**Judges 4:8** 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 4:9** And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh.

**Judges 4:10** ¶ And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him.

Barak told Deborah that he would only do as the LORD commanded if she would go with him. She immediately agreed to go, but warned him that he would not be honored with the victory; the LORD would destroy Sisera by the hand of a woman instead. So Deborah went with Barak and the troops that the LORD had commanded he take. They went to Kedesh, a place just southwest of the Sea of Galilee.

That Barak wanted to take Deborah shows that he wanted to believe that the LORD would do as He promised, but his faith was weak. Deborah was recognized as the LORD's spokesman, and he leaned on Deborah's faith to increase his. Barak responded like so many believers tend to do today. We want the support of strong men and women of faith, not realizing that just stepping out in obedience to God's word is all that is required for Him to give us the victory. Every true believer is empowered to do great things for the LORD; you don't have to be a Moses or Joshua or David. You just need to have faith!

In Barak's defense, this would have been a giant step of faith. It was like David going up against Goliath. It is interesting to note that the writer of the Hebrews

mentions Barak by name in the great “hall of faith” chapter. He may have needed extra encouragement to take that step of faith—but he did take it, and God honored him for it.

*Hebrews 11:32 “And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:”*

**Judges 4:11** Now Heber the Kenite, *which was* of the children of Hobab the father in law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaim, which is by Kedesh.

This verse seems totally unconnected at this point, but it provides foundational information for what is to come. We are told that Heber the Kenite, a relative of Moses by marriage, moved away from the rest of his family to live in the plain of Zaanaim by Kedesh.

**Judges 4:12** And they shewed Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam was gone up to mount Tabor.

**Judges 4:13** And Sisera gathered together all his chariots, *even* nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people that *were* with him, from Harosheth of the Gentiles unto the river of Kishon.

When Sisera was told that Barak was leading his troops to mount Tabor, he gathered his people, equipped with the 900 chariots, to meet them at the river of Kishon.

**Judges 4:14** And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this *is* the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee? So Barak went down from mount Tabor, and ten thousand men after him.

**Judges 4:15** And the LORD discomfited Sisera, and all *his* chariots, and all *his* host, with the edge of the sword before Barak; so that Sisera lighted down off *his* chariot, and fled away on his feet.

**Judges 4:16** But Barak pursued after the chariots, and after the host, unto Harosheth of the Gentiles: and all the host of Sisera fell upon the edge of the sword; *and* there was not a man left.

“discomfited” = put in commotion, disturb, destroy, trouble, vex

Deborah encouraged Barak and told him that the LORD would give him the victory over Sisera and his army that very day. Barak and his 10,000 men then headed out to war. The LORD went before them and “discomfited” Sisera, his chariots, and his men. Sisera ran away, while Barak focused on destroying the chariots and the enemy army. The LORD gave Israel a great victory; not one enemy soldier survived.

It would certainly be interesting to know how the LORD used the army of Israel to destroy those iron chariots that day. I am often reminded as I read through the scripture that “with God nothing is impossible.” (Luke 1:37) When I looked

ahead to the next chapter at Deborah's song, I got the impression that angels were involved.

*Judges 5:19–21 "The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money. They fought from heaven; **the stars in their courses fought against Sisera**. The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon."*

Angels are sometimes referenced in scripture as stars, and the Hebrew includes the idea of a prince (a person).

**Judges 4:17 ¶ Howbeit Sisera fled away on his feet to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite: for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.**

**Judges 4:18 And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not. And when he had turned in unto her into the tent, she covered him with a mantle.**

In his attempt to escape, Sisera came to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite (cf v11). Commentators note, and scriptures affirm, that it was not unusual for wives and husbands to have their own tents. Jael actually went out to meet Sisera and invited him in to her tent. He expected to find safety there since there was peace between Jabin, Sisera's king, and Heber; so he accepted. The fact that she covered him with a mantle indicates that he had lain down to take a nap.

**Judges 4:19 And he said unto her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water to drink; for I am thirsty. And she opened a bottle of milk, and gave him drink, and covered him.**

**Judges 4:20 Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and enquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No.**

**Judges 4:21 Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground: for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died.**

**Judges 4:22 And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples.**

Sisera asked Jael for a drink of water, and she gave him some milk. I wonder if this was considered an honor.

Sisera then asked Jael to stand at the tent door in case someone came looking for him. If anyone came asking if she had seen a man, she was to say, No. After he had fallen asleep, Jael killed Sisera by taking a tent nail and hammering it into his temple, nailing him to the ground. The NIV Commentary provided some insight: "Women normally did the work of putting up and taking down the tents; so Jael knew how to handle her tools."

One can't help but wonder why Jael so quickly determined to kill Sisera. I think the explanation has to be that the LORD put it in her heart.

It should be pointed out that this fulfilled Deborah's prophecy (v9).

Barak eventually showed up in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. She quickly told him that she could give him the man for whom he was searching. When he went into the tent, he saw Sisera with the nail in his temple.

Guzik included an interesting observation from Spurgeon: "Charles Spurgeon preached a wonderful sermon on this passage titled *Sin Slain* on how the we can take Sisera as a type of sin, and his master (Jabin) as a type of Satan. He insisted that we should not be content to merely *defeat* sin, as Barak defeated Sisera in battle; we should not rest until sin is *dead*. And, just as Jael asked Barak to look at the dead body of Sisera, Spurgeon said we should look at sin slain by the work of Jesus, knowing He has already won the battle. "If you are content merely to conquer your sins and not to kill them, you may depend upon it, it is the mere work of morality — a surface work — and not the work of the Holy Spirit."

**Judges 4:23** So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel.

**Judges 4:24** And the hand of the children of Israel prospered, and prevailed against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

The record notes that God vanquished Jabin the king of Canaan that day by utterly destroying his army. Yes, He used men and women; but it was through His empowerment.

Israel prospered and eventually destroyed king Jabin as well.