

The Defeat of the Canaanites by Deborah and Barak

Judges 4

Judges 4 - *“When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. ² So the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth Hagoyim. ³ And the children of Israel cried out to the LORD; for Jabin had nine hundred chariots of iron, and for twenty years he had harshly oppressed the children of Israel.*

⁴ Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. ⁵ And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. ⁶ Then she sent and called for Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, “Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded, ‘Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun; ⁷ and against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hand’?”

⁸ And Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!”

⁹ So she said, “I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.” Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. ¹⁰ And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; he went up with ten thousand men under his command, and Deborah went up with him.

¹¹ Now Heber the Kenite, of the children of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, had separated himself from the Kenites and pitched his tent near the terebinth tree at Zaanaim, which is beside Kedesh.

¹² And they reported to Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor. ¹³ So Sisera gathered together all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people who were with him, from Harosheth Hagoyim to the River Kishon.

¹⁴ Then Deborah said to Barak, “Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the LORD gone out before you?” So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. ¹⁵ And the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot. ¹⁶ But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth Hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left.

¹⁷ However, Sisera had fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; for there was peace between Jabin king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. ¹⁸ And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, “Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; do not fear.” And when he had turned aside with her into the tent, she covered him with a blanket.

¹⁹ Then he said to her, “Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.” So she opened a jug of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him. ²⁰ And he said to her, “Stand at the door of the tent, and if any man comes and inquires of you,

and says, 'Is there any man here?' you shall say, 'No.'"

²¹ Then Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went down into the ground; for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died. ²² Then, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said to him, "Come, I will show you the man whom you seek." And when he went into her tent, there lay Sisera, dead with the peg in his temple.

²³ So on that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan in the presence of the children of Israel. ²⁴ And the children of Israel grew stronger and stronger against Jabin king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan."

Background Notes

Judges 4 is the record of the third sin cycle in the book. After Judge Ehud died, the children of Israel once again "*did evil in the sight of the LORD*" (v1). As a result, in this cycle the Lord allowed the Canaanites to oppress His people. For 20 long, hard years, King Jabin and the Canaanites subdued Israel with military might. Jabin had 900 chariots under the command of his general, Sisera. The chariot was the tank of the ancient world. An army with chariots was far superior, humanly speaking, to an army that had only foot soldiers, such as Israel. Razor-sharp knives were attached to the chariot wheels to cut down would-be attackers.

Deborah, a woman of God, was the judge in Israel at this time. She was not only a wise judge, but she was also a prophetess. The Lord revealed to her that He would deliver the entire Canaanite army into the hands of the outnumbered and outclassed Israeli army. But notice - this good prophetic news came only after Israel had cried out to the Lord (v3). When Deborah communicated this good news to the Israeli general, Barak, he reluctantly agreed to go to war - but only if Deborah would go with him for support!

Deborah agreed to go, and the Lord gave Israel the victory: "*The LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot. But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth Hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left*" (v15-16). The Lord fought for Israel by sending a flash flood into the Valley of Jezreel where the battle was fought. How do we know this? The song of Deborah in Judges 5:21 tells us: "*The torrent of Kishon swept them away, that ancient torrent, the torrent of Kishon. O my soul, march on in strength!*"

Sisera and his 900 chariots were helplessly bogged down in the mud and muck that resulted from the flashflood. Barak and his men pursued the fleeing Canaanites, and not one soldier escaped, including General Sisera. He was killed when a woman named Jael, who apparently was not a Hebrew, sided with Israel and killed Sisera when he was asleep in her tent. "*Then Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went down into the ground; for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died*" (v21).

Doctrinal Points

1. Satan raises up "Jabins" and "Siseras" to defeat God's people.

Where do we see that lesson taught? Well, you'll remember that in the books of Joshua and Judges, in the spiritual picture that the Lord has given to us, the land of Canaan represents the land of spiritual blessing for the Christian. Satan wants to keep God's people defeated in this land of blessing, right? So in God's picture, Israel's enemies in the land of Canaan represent Satan and his forces, and reveal the tactics that he uses to keep us defeated in the Christian life.

Now we don't have to be defeated in spiritual warfare if we use the principles of victory that God has given to us in Scripture. Read Ephesians 6 in this connection. Unfortunately we often don't use the means that God has given us, and Satan is able to raise up "Jabins" and "Siseras" to oppress us and defeat us.

Notice that Jabin and Sisera were Canaanites, and Jabin, the king, reigned in Hazor, a stronghold in the north of Israel. This is the same Hazor that Joshua conquered more than one hundred years before this time! (See Joshua 11.) In fact, it was another King Jabin who was defeated in Joshua's day - perhaps an ancestor of the Judges 4 King Jabin.

The fact that Hazor had already been defeated provides a further spiritual picture here. **Enemies that have been defeated can rise again!** Many Christians have experienced victory over various kinds of sins, but have found that struggles with these same sins return. And Christians can experience defeat in these areas – sometimes more than once. Can you identify with that? The sin of doubt. The sin of bitterness. The sin of uncontrolled anger. The sin of pride. The sin of jealousy. Sexual sin. All kinds of sin can come back to fight with us - again and again.

The key to for spiritual warfare is to continually practice the biblical principles of victory. We must continue to put on all the spiritual armor of Ephesians 6, because we can be sure that Satan will raise up his Jabins and Siseras to try to defeat God's people.

2. God raises up "Deborahs" and "Jael" to help His people.

There were only three prophetesses in the Old Testament. Can you name them? Miriam, in Exodus 15; Huldah (at the time of King Josiah), in 2 Kings 22; and Deborah, in Judges 4. Deborah was not only a prophetess, but she was also a judge in Israel - the only woman judge.

There's a distinctive difference in the roles God has designed for men and women. Normally God uses men to lead His people. This is true in the local church, as we see in 1 Timothy 2. But when no men step forward to do a leadership job - because of lack of moral courage, or lack of commitment, or lack of faith (as we see here in the days of the judges) - God will raise up a "Deborah" to lead His people.

Deborah was a unique woman for a very special time and place, a woman of great faith and ability. God had gifted her with wisdom and insight. Why? Answer: to help His people. When Israel cried out to the Lord, Deborah was there. She was available, and she was willing for God to use her. God used Deborah's wisdom and insight to help His people.

What about Jael? Jael and her husband Heber were not Hebrews, although Heber, at least, was a Kenite (v17). Apparently Heber had made a peace-pact with Jabin, the king of the Canaanites. But Jael, for whatever reason, sided

with Israel. Maybe she saw the political handwriting on the wall! Jael sided with Israel when Sisera, the defeated Canaanite general, sought refuge in her tent – and then Jael eliminated Sisera! God used Jael's courage and foresight to help His people.

God can use any person to help His people – a believer, or even an unbeliever. Think of all the non-Christians that God has used in your life to help you, perhaps to direct you away from ungodly activity! God can use non-Christian bosses, non-Christian friends, maybe even non-Christian parents. This doesn't condone ungodly attitudes or activity that these unbelievers may be involved in, but you can see the lesson. God raises up "Deborahs" and "Jael's" to help His people.

Practical Application

When we do our part, God does His part.

Deborah and Barak planned and prepared for battle. They were the underdogs, but they obeyed God and did their part, just as God had directed. Even reluctant Barak is commended for his faith in Hebrews 11:32 - *"And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets..."*

Then God stepped in and did His part. He sent the cloudburst, because He controls the weather. He had Jael available and ready to take action - and she "just happened" to live beside the road where Sisera was trying to escape. When we do our part, God always does His part!

Are we doing our part? Maybe we're not! And maybe that's why we're not seeing answers to our prayers in our churches and ministries.

Are we doing our part? Are we wisely and courageously using the gifts and talents that God has given us, to the best of our ability, as Deborah and Jael did? When we do our part, God does His part.