

Day 242 - WEDNESDAY: August 30th

Judges 4

Judges 4:1-24 NKJV

When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. 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. 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. Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. 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. 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; 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?'" 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!" 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. And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; he went up with ten thousand men under his command, and Deborah went up with him. 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. And they reported to Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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.'" 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. And 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. So on that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan in the presence of the children of Israel. And the hand of the children of Israel grew stronger and stronger against Jabin king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

Daily Deep Dive:

Here's what the UCG reading plan has for this chapter: "Once the restraining influence of Ehud's leadership was removed, "the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord" (verse 1). *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* refers to the quotation here as "the sin phrase." It occurs six times in the book of Judges (see Judges 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). For their rebellion this time, God sold them to Jabin, king of

Canaan in Hazor, who cruelly oppressed them 20 years. Long before, Joshua had defeated a king of Hazor named Jabin (Joshua 11:1-15). The same name has been found in a text from the archeological site of Mari on the River Euphrates (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on Judges 4:2). Such facts may suggest that *Jabin* was a title rather than a proper name, like *Abimelech* among the Philistines or *Ben-Hadad* among the Syrians. It does not appear to have dawned on the Israelites that as they continued to disobey God their periods of servitude lasted longer and grew more intense in severity. Neither did it occur to them that, one way or the other, they were going to serve *someone*—God or a gentile. Their service to God was light and held great reward, but their service to the gentiles was always heavy and bitter. Were these men mad in not being able to discern such things? No, they were simply carnal, and carnality does not like restraint of any kind—enabling their willing blindness to reality.

At this time Deborah was judging Israel. How she became a judge we do not know, but perhaps her status as a prophetess caused Israel to seek counsel and justice at her word. Her judgeship, however, took place during the oppression of Jabin and must have been limited to religious matters and civil matters of little consequence to him. It was while she was judging Israel that she received a revelation instructing her to call Barak and inform him that God had chosen him to free Israel.

When Barak came to Deborah and received word of God's intention, he agreed to assume the task but only if Deborah would accompany him. Barak's reluctance is not too difficult to understand when one considers that what made Jabin's army so formidable was the presence of 900 chariots of iron. These were strategic superweapons when pitted against forces without them, such as Israel's. Furthermore, the number of chariots suggests that Jabin had built a very large standing army. To attempt to defeat such a numerically superior and well-armed force

would be quite daunting, and trepidation, especially given Jabin's cruelty, would be the natural response. Also, Barak may have questioned the truth of Deborah's revelation. Was she issuing a false prophecy, one of her own making? If she would go with him, Barak could be assured that the prophecy was true—else why would Deborah hazard her life for what she knew to be a falsehood?

Fear, of course, is an enemy of faith. And despite the fact that Barak is recorded in Hebrews 11:32 as an example of faith, his wavering in this situation would cause the honor of victory to go to a woman, leaving Barak somewhat disgraced. Nevertheless, Barak still consented to the task, perhaps expecting that woman to be Deborah—which would not have seemed so bad considering the important position she already occupied. Instead, God chose yet another woman, further stripping Barak of honor.

Many of the judges raised armies from only one or two of the Israelite tribes, which is evidence that Israel was probably more of a loose tribal confederation at this time. Barak's army was drawn primarily from Zebulun and Naphtali. Chapter 5 of Judges reveals that smaller elements of Issachar, Benjamin, Manasseh and Reuben were also present, but Reuben (true to his nature, Genesis 49:3-4) vacillated. Large parts of Manasseh remained beyond Jordan, and Dan and Asher preferred to continue their shipping trade rather than engage in a war of liberation. At this time in their history, Israel had no strong central government that organized and legislated for all the nation. The individual tribes acted in their own self-interest, with most of the governmental authority of the nation being vested in the tribal elders.

The engagement at the River Kishon was a complete rout of Sisera, general of Jabin's army. The entire Canaanite army was exterminated, and Sisera fled on foot. Unhappily for Sisera, he came across the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. Exhausted and begging water, Jael

instead gave him milk—a wise move considering the sleep-inducing properties of milk. Sisera's fatigue combined with a large amount of milk sent him fast off to sleep, a slumber so dense that Jael was able to sneak into the tent and kill Sisera by driving a tent peg through his skull. With his army destroyed, all his chariots captured and the military genius of Sisera gone, Jabin's days were numbered. Israel grew stronger and stronger until they finally killed Jabin and destroyed his persecuting power forever. And Israel had peace 40 years.” [END]

Verse 4 – The name Deborah means “bee”. She is called the feminine form of the Hebrew word for “prophet”. Before this point, it was used only once in Exodus 15:20 referring to Miriam. It will be used of several other women in the Bible. The male form of the word was first used for Abraham and then later for Aaron.

Verse 6 – The JFB commentary draws out that the wording “Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded?” is a Hebrew form of making an emphatic communication.

Verse 9 – Clearly God had provided Deborah with a vision of what would take place for her to be able to prophesy so specifically.