

Bible Stories

DEBORAH, BARAK & Jael

By the Hands of a Woman

Judges 4:4
September 10, 2022

After Ehud died, we find Israel doing what they did best.... *"They returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers, following other gods and serving and worshiping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways."* {Judges 2:19}

And the cycle began all over again:

- Israel did evil in the sight of Yahweh
- Yahweh handed Israel over to Jabin, king of Canaan, who oppressed them cruelly for 20 years.
- Israel cried to Yahweh.

Here are the players in our story – found in **Judges 4:1-5:31**: Deborah, Barak, Sisera, and Jael.

Judges 4:4 - Now at that time **Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel.**

In those days the male elders of a city would sit at the city gate making judgments on disputes and witnessing transactions {see Ruth 4:1-12}.

Not **Deborah**.... She sat under her own palm tree, *"between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim,"* and the people came to her.

She is the only individual, throughout the book, who actually worked in the capacity of Judge in Israel.

Barak was the son of Abinoam of the tribe of Naphtali. God had designed that **HE** should be the deliverer of Israel, so directed Deborah to send for him:

Deborah: *Yahweh, the God of Israel, has commanded that you take 10,000 men from the descendants of Naphtali and Zebulun and go to Mount Tabor. He says, 'I will draw out Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and troops, to the wadi of Kishon, and I will give him into your hand.'*

So, God had said, *"I have chosen you"* and *"I will give your enemy to you,"* but Barak knew the condition of Israel's *"army"* and the strength and skill of the enemy and this caused him to be hesitant to accept the call. He accepted that God had called him, but he didn't trust that anyone would actually show up to the draft board. Thinking that if Deborah, the prophetess and judge, joined him, he would be more successful, he replied {see PP chapter 53}:

Barak: *If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go.*

Deborah: *Okay, I'll go with you; but you will not get the glory for this victory. Yahweh will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.*

Barak summoned the men of Zebulun and Naphtali to Kadesh and Deborah went with them.

Verse 11 of chapter 4 seems to provide us with an irrelevant piece of information – *"Heber,"* the Kenite, a descendent of Moses' father-in-law, lived at Elon-bezaananim, near Kadesh.

Let's keep this tid-bit in the back of our minds for use at a later time.....

Now ---- the rest of the story.

Sisera was the general of king Jabin's army.

When he was told that Barak was at Mount Tabor, he summoned his entire army, including his 900 iron chariots, to the wadi of Kishon.

Deborah to Barak: *Get up! This is the day that Yahweh has given Sisera into your hand. Yahweh has gone out before you.*

Barak left Mount Tabor with his 10,000 men, and went to engage Sisera.

Think of this battle as something akin to the horse-mounted Polish army taking on German tanks in 1939.

Barak was out gunned, but he had a secret weapon ---- Yahweh.

Clear back in the time of the desert wanderings, Yahweh had promised Israel, ***“If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands.... You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall by the sword before you. ⁸ Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you.”*** {Leviticus 26:3-8}

Yahweh threw Sisera, all his chariots and his entire army into confusion before Barak even lifted a finger.

In Deborah’s song, found in **chapter 5 {v.4-5}**, we get a hint of what happened: An earthquake, a sudden and torrential rain storm, followed by a flash flood that swept down the wadi of Kishon, immobilizing Sisera’s chariots, making them useless in battle.... chaos ensued.

Things were so bad that Sisera abandoned *his* chariot and his men and fled on foot, leaving his army to fend for themselves. Barak’s men pursued them as far as Harosheth Haggoyim – no one survived.

Sisera was on the run, but where to go?

Remember **“Heber”**?

Scripture tells us that there was peace between the house of Heber and king Jabin, so, to the tent of **Jael**, Heber’s wife, Sisera went.

Jael came out to meet Sisera. ***“Come in, my lord and don’t be afraid,”*** she said.

Sisera came into Jael’s tent and she made him comfortable - covering him with a blanket.

He asked for some water – she gave him a glass of milk.

Now warm and cozy, the exhausted Sisera’s eyes began to droop. Before falling asleep, he asked Jael to stand guard at the door and tell anyone who enquired, that there was no one else inside.

Sisera was now fast asleep. Jael, however, was not standing watch at the door. She had gone, instead, to the storage shed and retrieved a tent peg and a hammer..... {dramatic music}

Tiptoeing back into the tent, Jael knelt beside Sisera, took the tent peg, and drove it into his temple – clear through his head and into the ground.

Barak, who had been in hot pursuit of Sisera came screeching into camp - Jael went out to meet him.

Jael: *Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.*

There was Sisera lying quite dead on the floor – his head literally skewered to the ground – slain by the hand of a woman.

What do we do with this story?

This story is not really about Deborah or Barak. It’s about Jael.

God didn’t choose Deborah to be the deliverer of Israel – she was already doing what God had asked her to do.

He chose Barak, but he was too afraid, too unsure, too hesitant, too unwilling, so God chose someone who was willing to be used. Jael made herself available to God and He used her to break the back of Israel’s oppressor.

God uses ordinary people going about their ordinary lives to do his greatest work.

The only criteria being willingness and availability.