

Judges 4

Introduction – A woman raises up a man to lead an army against the enemies of Israel. Complete victory is accomplished and is capped off by another woman crushing the wicked leader of the enemy's army. That's the simple plot - but this piece of divine literature is packed full of more symbols, types, and allusions than you might believe at first. This is one reason why the righteous are described as those who meditate day and night upon the Word (Psalm 1).

Jabin Again (vv 1-3) – When the sons of Israel do evil again, remember this points to idolatry at its core (2:11). Once again, God sells them into the hand of a wicked king, and once again there is irony in the setup of the story.

Jabin – Either this king of Canaan had the same name as a predecessor in Joshua 11, or the name is a title, like Pharaoh. Jabin had been destroyed, Hazor had been totally devoted to the Lord, and now Israel was being sold over to them by their God.

Harosheth of the Gentiles – This area, in the north, is the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, north and west of the sea of Galilee. Sisera commands an army, oppressing the sons of Israel with great severity. But this land of darkness was to see a great light (Isaiah 9:1ff).

900 Iron Chariots – Remember them? This is what Judah had feared in Judges 1:19 generations ago.

Deborah, The Mother of Israel (vv 4-5) – This woman is a prophetess and was judging Israel under a tree. It is certainly unusual to find a time when a woman was a prophetess or a judge or a queen in the history of Israel. In that sense, she is an unlikely judge. But she is fruitful in her role, bringing forth Barak to lead the people into victory. It is not too much of a stretch to consider her as a mother-figure for Israel (she does in 5:7). Remember that the serpent is told that there will be enmity between him and the woman (Gen 3:15) and that from this woman a Seed would come forth to bruise the serpent's head. The church is called the bride of Christ, but she is also referred to as the mother of all believers (Gal 4:26-27). Deborah is a picture of our mother, the church.

Trees – It's hard to overestimate the importance of trees in the Bible. We were first judged at a tree, and our judgment is paid by our Savior who hangs on a tree. The Tabernacle is pitched under a great tree where the Book of the Law of God was kept (Josh 24:26). It was a place that represented a gate to heaven, a place of righteousness and justice, and (later) a place of healing and food (Rev 22:2).

Obey Your Mother (vv 6-10) – With that word-picture in mind, listen to what this prophetess proclaims and consider the response of those she calls.

Barak – was most likely a Levite from the city of Kedesh, and therefore a priest of some sort. Deborah raises up a seed to deliver her people (Gal 4:26-27). Barak's faith is tested as Deborah pronounces the command of the Lord – a command filled with promise (vv 6-7). The plan includes a great test for Barak for it does not contain any contingencies for the iron chariots and the great army they will face.

A Response of Faith (vv 8-10) – We should note Deborah's response to Barak's struggle to believe. There is a gentle rebuke, but I think we would do well to note it's gentleness. Barak does believe, raises up an army of 10,000, and does lead them to victory. He is included in the hall of faith in Hebrews 11 (v 32) as well. He is an example to follow.

Another Battle, Another Woman (vv10-24) – God does just what He promised. Sisera is provoked to the river valley below Mount Tabor expecting to rout the Israelites. He brings all of his chariots and all of his army. What happened? Why does Sisera leap from his chariot and flee? Deborah's song gives us the reason (Judges 5:4-5, 21). Sisera had his iron chariots, but Barak had the chariots from heaven (Psalm 104:3). The panic ensued, and all of Sisera's army were killed, '*...they all fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left*'.

Jael – Heber had apostatized from the Lord (v11) and made peace with Sisera (one should note another tree, another woman, and another judgment all come into play). Sisera was a cruel oppressor of Israel, guilty of raping and pillaging (5:30). Jael was not going to go along for the ride. In fact, she makes a point of deceiving Sisera to come into her home. Carefully considering WWJD, Jael let's God's enemy fall asleep and then drives a tent peg into his temple. Many try to charge Jael as acting out of God's will on a number of counts. Deborah, the prophetess of God, commends her (5:24-27) with a blessing similar to that given to Mary in Luke 1:28.

Choosing Sides – We have already seen with Ehud that deception and killing are not unlawful in times of war. Jael is also condemned by some for disobeying her husband, her 'lord' (1 Pet 3:1,6). But Jael is the perfect example of one who showed chaste conduct and holy fear. Jesus makes clear to us where the lines of ultimate submission are to be drawn (Matt 10:34-37, see also Ex 32:26-29, Deut 33:8-9). A wife is to submit to and honor her husband, but when times of crisis and real choosing are required, she must side with the Lord.

Applications/Meditations - As we said, we need to be like a tree ourselves, as in Psalm 1, planted by the waters to meditate. Consider, for instance in light of your own war for holiness (1 Pet 2:11) -

The Battle is the Lord's - "*On that day, God subdued Jabin...*" (v23). Your salvation was all of the Lord, and your sanctification will be all of the Lord and in the Lord.

Total Victory is Promised (Rom 8:31-32, Phil 1:6) - God has triumphed over your worst enemy. Now, He has proclaimed 'holy war' again, equipping and enabling His people to fight the battle in faith.

Do Not Live by Sight - Barak could not have believed God's Word based on what he could see. And neither can we, with regard to our own sanctification, nor with regard to the discipling of the nations. But we are not called to live by sight. *Dave Hatcher,*

December 1, 2002