

## Judges 4:1-24

### Deborah, Barak and Jael

See <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/deborah-2-midrash-and-aggadah>

<https://www.azamra.org/Bible/Judges%203-4.htm>

**Judges 4:1-2** - "And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead. 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."

Joshua had burned Hazor and defeated its king Jabin a century before (**Joshua 11**). The Canaanites have retaken and rebuilt it. The name Jabin, "the discerning," may possibly have been a standing name or title of the Canaanitish kings of Hazor, as Abimelech was of the kings of the Philistines

**Harosheth.**—The name means "wood-cutting." The town could have been named from the fact that Sisera made the subject Israelites serve as "hewers of wood" in the cedar-woods and fir-woods of Lebanon. Possibly these woodcutters, armed with axes and hatchets, formed the soldiers of Barak's army.

"Harosheth" is the same Hebrew word used to describe the cutting and carving craftsmanship of Bezalel, who designed the utensils of the Tabernacle (**Exodus 31:5**).

Possibly this is a spiritual type of God using Sisera and Jabin as a tool to craft or work on them, to bring Israel to repentance and transform them back into the kind of a people who could be used by God - living stones in a spiritual temple.

**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."

"Oppressed" = *lachs* - The same word is used **Exodus 3:9** of the oppression of Israel by the Egyptians.

"mightily" - oppressed them more than the previous Moabites

Idolatry causes us to fall back under the thumb of the oppression of the world, where we were before God saved us.

"900 chariots of iron" - i.e. with iron wheels. Archaeologists have found a piece of a 3,200-year-old bronze linchpin from one of Sisera's chariots. These might have also had scythes attached to the wheels on either side, which could easily cut down infantry.

Israel should have recalled what God did to Pharaoh's chariots:

- **Exodus 14:25** - "And He took off their chariot wheels, so that they drove them with difficulty; and the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the face of Israel, for the LORD fights for them against the Egyptians."

- **Psalm 20:7, 8** - "Some boast in chariots, and some in horses; But we will boast in the name of the LORD, our God. They have bowed down and fallen; But we have risen and stood upright."

## Deborah

**Judges 4:4-5** - "And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time. 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."

Deborah is included among the seven women prophets of Israel enumerated by the Rabbis: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah and Esther (BT Megillah loc. cit.).

The Targum adds, "She was dwelling in a city in Ataroth, Deborah was supported of her own; she had palm trees in Jericho, orchards in Ramah, olives producing oil in the valley, a place of watering in Bethel, and white dust in the kings mountain."

Her name means "bee" indicating her being industrious in the Torah. She had a sting for Israel's enemies and honey for her friends., according to the Talmud.

Deborah's tribal affiliation is unclear from the Bible. She is aided by Barak, from the tribe of Naphtali, and by a number of additional tribes that participated in the war. The midrash traces her lineage to Naphtali, which is consistent with the tradition that Barak was her husband. In the exegetical expansion, when Jacob blesses his sons before his death he mentions Deborah in his blessing of Naphtali (**Genesis 49:21**): "Naphtali is a hind let loose, which yields lovely fawns"; "a hind let loose" is a reference to Deborah, who would be born into this tribe (Midrash Tehillim [ed. Buber], 22:1).

The Rabbis derive her husband's name "*lapidot*" from the word *lapid* ("torch"). Deborah prepared thick wicks, that would give much light; these her husband would bring to the Tabernacle at Shiloh for the lamps (the Golden Lampstand in the Holy Place?).

When God, who tests people's innermost thoughts, saw Deborah's actions, He told her: "Deborah, you intended to increase My light; I, too, shall increase your light in Judah and in Jerusalem" (Seder Eliyahu Rabbah [ed. Friedmann (Ish-Shalom)], para. 10, 48–49; Yalkut Shimoni, Judges 4, para. 42).

One tradition says Deborah's husband was actually Barak.

In this tradition, Deborah's husband had three names: Barak, Michael and Lapidoth: Barak, because his face was like lightning; Michael, because he would lower (*memikh*) himself, or after the angel by this name; Lapidoth, because of the wicks that he would

bring to the Tabernacle at Shiloh.

Deborah would sit under the palm tree and teach Torah in public, because a woman would not normally be alone with men within her house (Seder Eliyahu Rabbah loc. cit.). In Israel's sorry state, however, those who first came to learn from her were only as half a date tree, and so she was said "to sit under a palm" (Seder Eliyahu Rabbah, Chap. 10, 50). Just as the palm tree has a heart (all its branches issue forth from the same place), so, too, was that generation who sat under her teaching, who [eventually] had only a single heart for their Father in Heaven (BT Megillah 14:1).

She sat "between Ramah and Bethel" - Like Samuel (I Samuel 7:17): "Then he would return to Ramah, for his home was there, and there too he would judge Israel." "*Ramah*" (literally, "height") as descriptive of the elevated spiritual qualities of the prophecy of Deborah and of Samuel.

**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?"

### **Barak's Humility**

Barak ("lightening") was the chief character, who assigned himself a secondary role. His primacy is taught by Deborah's telling him (**Judges 4:6**): "The Lord, the God of Israel, has commanded: Go, march up [...] and take [...]" He places himself in a subordinate position when he says to her (v. 8): "If you will go with me, I will go; if not, I will not go."

He was not jealous that a woman had more influence, importance and respect.

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[There another school of rabbinical thought in which Deborah is too prideful, and Barak is criticized for allowing an uppity woman to rise above her station, but it makes no spiritual sense from a New Testament viewpoint.]

**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."

When a flesh-and-blood king's servants and armies go forth to war, he follows behind, but God does not do so: He precedes His armies (Tanhuma, Shoftim 17).

- **Deuteronomy 9:3** - "Understand therefore this day, that the LORD thy God is he which goeth over before thee; as a consuming fire he shall destroy them, and he shall bring them down before thy face: so shalt thou drive them out, and destroy them quickly, as the LORD hath said unto thee."

To leave the protected stronghold of the mountains and confront the Canaanites in the Valley of Jezreel, where their chariots could operate freely, was an unexpected and bold move, exhibiting great faith. It also may have startled and confused the enemy.

**Judges 4:15-16** - "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 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..

"discomfitted" = *hamam* - to move noisily, confuse, make a noise, discomfit, break, consume, crush, destroy, trouble, vex

It is used in the sense of "drive" in Isaiah - **Isaiah 28:28** - "he drives the wheels of his threshing wain"

It implies they were discomfited with great terror and noise, probably with thunder, lightning, and hailstones, poured out from heaven, as is implied in the Song in **Judges 5:20**.

Josephus asserts, "as soon as the armies were engaged, there arose a prodigious tempest of hail and rain, which drove in the faces of the Canaanites, and occasioned a total rout of them." — (Antiq., lib. 5. cap. 5.)

The Song in Chapter 5 also points to the River Kishon, called the waters of Megiddo, which would have overflowed and caused Sisera's chariots to bog down in the mud, as did Pharaoh's chariots at the Red Sea.

## Armageddon

Megiddo - The site dates back roughly 8,000 years. It controlled the main route between Egypt and Mesopotamia, what the Egyptians called the Way of the Sea.

In the Book of Revelation, the final battle takes place at Armageddon, or *Har Megiddo*, the hill or mountain of Megiddo. There is no mountain, but the hill consist of the layers of ruins from previous occupations. The first battle to be historically recorded with detail occurred there around 1480 B.C. when Thutmose III defeated a coalition of Canaanite vassal states led by the king of Kadesh. Many other battles were fought there throughout history.

According to **Revelation 16:14-16**, evil spirits will gather the nations of the world to "the battle of that great day of God Almighty. ... And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon."

The battle is cosmic in scope -

- **Revelation 16:20-21** - "And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great."

The reference is clearly to the battle we're studying in here **Judges 4 and 5**. Or rather, the victory of Deborah and Barak is a type of God's final victory. It is a "symbol of every battle in which, when the need is greatest and believers are oppressed, the Lord suddenly reveals His power in the interest of His distressed people and defeats the enemy." - *William Hendriksen*

Further, it encompasses the long struggle against the old enemy Satan from the time of Genesis. The Greek word "*polemo*", translated "battle" in **Revelation 16:14**, signifies a war or campaign, while "*machē*" signifies a battle, and sometimes even single combat. It carries the assurance of God's victory in that long campaign, and in the spiritual warfare within each believer.

## Jael

**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."

"Jael" means Ibex, a nimble, sure footed mountain goat

Recall that in verses 11-12, Heber the Kenite had showed Sisera where Barak was positioned. The Kenites, sometimes associated with the Midianites, had traditionally been close to the Jews. Heber was a descendant of Reuel the Midianite, the father-in-law of Moses. Although Heber was allied with Jabin the Canaanite (or just a neutral entity), Jael apparently still was sympathetic to the oppressed Jews.

According to the custom of nomadic tribes, Jael would have had her own tent, separate from Heber's.

**Judges 4:18-19** - "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. 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."

Instead of water, she gives him milk, which makes him sleepy.

**Judges 4:20-21** - "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. 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."

Sisera was Jael's guest, was in the sanctuary of her home, and protected by the laws of hospitality. In killing him, she broke longstanding laws and customs. This assassination stands with Ehud's murder of Eglon as questionable for unjust tactics, while at the same time an example of the spiritual victory of Christ over Satan.

In practical terms, Jael may have acted out of necessity. Sisera was in flight and Barak in pursuit. It would not have been wise to allow Barak to find Sisera in her tent. She also knew that Sisera would be killed if captured, therefore she would kill him and thus cement a friendship with the victor.

Jael's action was part of a long tradition foreshadowing the fulfillment of the prophecy of **Genesis 3:15**, in which the Deliverer/ Messiah will crush the head of the serpent, but receive a deadly, venomous bite on his heel.

- **Genesis 3:15** - "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

Another example of female victory using wit and stealth is the story of Judith, who decapitates the Babylonian general Holofernes. The fulfillment was in Mary, who brought Jesus into the world, who defeated Satan on the cross and with His resurrection. All took risks to bring salvation to Israel.

In fact, Jael, like Mary, is called "blessed shall she be above women" (**Judges 5:24**)

The spike or nail she uses foreshadows the cross.

As a tent peg, it resonates with **Isaiah 54:2-3**, which says: "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities."

The Song in the next chapter adds that she "smote off his head" (**Judges 5:26**).

- **Habakkuk 3:12-13** - "You marched across the earth with fury; You threshed the nations in wrath. You went forth for the salvation of Your people, to save Your anointed. You crushed the head of the house of the wicked and stripped him from head to toe. Selah"

## The Victory

**Judges 4:22-24** - "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. So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel. 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."

Pseudo-Philo refers to Jael in the book, *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, and reflects how Jews of Jesus' day viewed this story:

Now Jael took a stake in her left hand and approached him, saying, "If God will work this sign with me, I know that Sisera will fall into my hands. Behold I will throw him down on the ground from the bed on which he sleeps; and if he does not feel it, I know that he has been handed over."

And Jael took Sisera and pushed him onto the ground from the bed. But he did not feel it, because he was very groggy. And Jael said, "Strengthen in me today, Lord, my arm on account of you and your people and those who hope in you." And Jael took the stake and put it on his temple and struck it with a hammer.

And while he was dying, Sisera said to Jael, "Behold pain has taken hold of me, Jael, and I die like a woman." And Jael said to him, "Go, boast before your father in hell and tell him that you have fallen into the hands of a woman."

Deborah and Barak recited the Hallel prayer after seeing the miracles that God performed for them. They said (**Psalm 115:1**): "Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to Your name bring glory for the sake of Your love and Your faithfulness," and the spirit of divine inspiration responded (**Isaiah 48:11**): "For My sake, My own sake, do I act." It was enacted that Israel recite Hallel at every important epoch and at every misfortune that comes upon the world; and when they are redeemed, they recite it for their redemption (BT Pesachim 117a).

The next chapter is the Song of Deborah and Barak thanking God for the victory, and adding details not discussed in Chapter 4.