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## **Judges 4**

(2020)

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## Judges 4

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### Topics.

After Ehud died, Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD.

The LORD gave Israel into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan.

Deborah and Barak go up against Sisera, the general of Jabin's army.

Sisera with 900 chariots, goes up against Israel.

Barak descend from Mount Tabor and defeats Sisera's armies.

Jael the wife of Heber drives a tent peg into Sisera's temple so he died.

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### INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JUDGES

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The Israelites forgot the LORD, and worshipped false gods, so the LORD removed His protection and blessings from them, which resulted in them being oppressed by their enemies and crying to the LORD for deliverance. In answer to their prayer the LORD raised up twelve Judges to deliver them, but not Judges as we think of Judges today or preachers of righteousness, but rather military leaders and fighters, that led Israel to triumph over their enemies and delivered them from their wicked behaviour. Most suppose that Samuel (considered by some to be the last Judge) wrote some parts of the book, while other parts were written at a later time by someone of his generation or a later generation. The primary purpose of the Judges is best articulated in the following words, "The LORD raised up Judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. (Judges 2:16). For an overview of the entire book see the title:

- Overview of the Book of Judges (at the beginning of the index).

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### THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER

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Israel dwelt amongst the Philistines, Canaanites, Sidonians and Hivites and took foreign daughters for wives, and served Baals and Asheroth. Cushan-rishathaim the king of Mesopotamia ruled over Israel eight years, then Othniel the LORD'S deliverer defeated him, and the land had rest forty-years. Othniel died and Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served Eglon king of Moab for eighteen years. The LORD raises up Ehud, he thrusts a dagger into Eglon's belly and he died. Israel then killed about 10,000 Moabites and the land had rest for eighty years. The chapter ends with Shamgar killing 600 Philistines with an ox-goad.

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### ISRAEL AGAIN DOES EVIL

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#### JUDGES 4:1-2

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- **Judges 4:1-2:** And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD after Ehud died.<sup>2</sup> And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander (captain in KJV) of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim (Harosheth in KJV).

Prosperity and peace brought Israel to ruin, the land had rest for eighty years, but instead of it strengthening them in their Jewish faith, they indulged their lusts and turned to idols and Baals. The book of Judges

shows that when distress became so great upon Israel and they saw no hope and no way of escape, it drove them to seek the Lord their God. God would raise up a Judge (i.e., a deliver), Israel would have peace until the deliver died, after which they would turn from the LORD to wickedness and idols.

**Hazor:** refers to the city, which though taken and burnt by Joshua may now have been retaken and rebuilt by the Canaanites, or because the names of cities are often put forward for their territories it could refer to the territory or kingdom of Hazor, that may now have been restored to its former largeness and power.

- Joshua turned back at that time and captured Hazor and struck its king with the sword, for Hazor formerly was the head of all those kingdoms.<sup>11</sup> And they struck with the sword all who were in it, devoting them to destruction; there was none left that breathed. And he burned Hazor with fire. (Josh. 11:10-11).

**Harosheth-hagoyim (Harosheth of the Gentiles in KJV):** (v2) called of the Gentile, because it was mostly inhabited by Gentiles, either the Canaanites who had been driven out of their previous lands and established themselves in these northern parts, or by various other nations that had set themselves up here.

**Jabin king of Canaan:** (v2) refers to some great tribe or nation of the Canaanite. The name Jabin means, "he is wise," and is a royal title, it may have been a dynastic name, like Abimelech, Melchizedek, Pharaoh, Hadad, Agag etc. He reigned in the territory of Hazor (i.e., the kingdom of Hazor), which seems to embrace that part of the land in the northern part of Canaan where most of the Canaanites dwelt. He no doubt constantly sought for opportunities to recover his ancient land and at some stage possessed the site where Hazor formerly stood and had now rebuilt the city to its former magnitude and power.

**Sisera:** (v2) was the commander (captain in KJV) of Jabin's army and lived in Harosheth-hagoyim.

**Jabin and Sisera,** greatly oppressed Israel, for this was the severest oppression to which Israel had been subjected and fell heaviest on the tribes in the north. After twenty years of oppression and servitude they became aware and acknowledge that the punishment was a result of their sins and sought the LORD for deliverance from their oppressor.

**The LORD sold them:** (v2), meaning He delivered them into bondage and slavery, as men were sold for slaves.

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## ISRAEL CRIES TO THE LORD

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### JUDGES 4:3

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- **Judges 4:3:** Then the people of Israel cried out to the LORD for help, for he (Sisera the commander of the army) (v1), had 900 chariots of iron and he oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for twenty years.

**Israel cried to the LORD:** (v3), because of their long oppression and humiliating subjection they were brought to an awareness that their national sins had brought this hard bondage on them, and in repentance begged the LORD'S deliverance.

**Nine hundred chariots of iron:** (v3), such chariots had razor sharp blades on both sides fixed to the end of their axel. It is said that some of these razor-sharp blades projected two metres out each side, that would cut soldiers to pieces while charging at great speeds among the army. Ponder for a moment how many men nine hundred of these chariots charging into an army of foot-soldiers would be slayed in a matter of moments. The Israelites dared not go up against their oppressors for fear of so many chariots, and having no hope of freeing themselves cried to the LORD for help.

**Twenty years:** the LORD allowed Israel's enemies to oppress them the first time for only eight years, and the second time eighteen years and now this time twenty years, as Israel increased their sins and repeated revolts, the LORD increased their oppressions, accordingly.

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## DEBORAH THE PROPHETESS

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### JUDGES 4:4-6

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- **Judges 4:4-6:** Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. <sup>5</sup> She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment. <sup>6</sup> She sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali and said to him, "Has not the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you, 'Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun.' <sup>7</sup> And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand?"

**Deborah, a prophetess:** (v4) her name means "bee," she was the only female judge, and female ruler of any kind in Jewish history, and the only judge who the title "prophet" is specifically given. She was a prophetess like:

Miriam.

- Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. (Exodus 15:20).

Huldah.

- So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter), and they talked with her. (2 Kings 22:14).

Noadiah.

- Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid. (Neh. 6:14).

Anna.

- And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin. (Luke 2:36).

### Twelve facts concerning Deborah:

1. Toward the close of the twenty years' oppression under Jabin, God raised her up as He did the other judges.
2. She was a woman of extraordinary knowledge, wisdom, and devotion, instructed in divine knowledge by the Spirit and able to interpret God's will.
3. She made certain predictions, which are recorded in the following verses:
  - And she said, "I will surely go with you (Barak). Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. (Judges 4:9).
4. She was called a mother of Israel and was a woman of great courage.
  - The villagers ceased in Israel; they ceased to be until I arose; I, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel. (Judges 5:7).

5. Verse five shows that prior to the war people came to Deborah to determine peaceful arbitration, legal decisions, grievances and controversies arising among the Israelites, by which she gained extensive influence, power and authority and was held in universal respect with the people.
  - She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment. (Judges 4:5).
6. She sings a beautiful inspired prophetic song (Judges chapter five).
7. She endeavoured to convince the people of their sins, exhort them to repentance, and was a means of reforming the people.
8. She administered justice and judgment in all cases brought before her.
9. She was gifted, at least in some instances, with the gift of prophecy for she foretold the following events:
  - I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand? (Judges 4:7).
  - I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. (Judges 4:9).
10. She performed all the unique and special duties of a judge, except that of military leader.
11. She was instructed in Divine knowledge by the inspiration of the Spirit of God and as such judged Israel as God's mouth to them.
12. By God's direction, she ordered Barak to raise an army, and march against Jabin's forces. Barak asked that she go with him, she promised she would, for she would not send him where she would not go herself. In this she manifested the godly principle, "those who in God's name call others to their duty, should be ready and willing to assist them in it."

**The wife of Lapidoth:** (v4) this is the only time Lapidoth occurs in Scripture, what the name means is uncertain, some say it means, "flames," "lamps," or "splendours." It is said by some that she was called, "a woman of lamps," from making the wicks for the lamps of the sanctuary.

**She sat under the palm of Deborah:** (v5) or, a palm grove (i.e., a circled area of palm trees), under the canopy of broad palm branches giving much shade to the area. It could be said, that her office was in the open air, under a canopy of palm trees and that her office chair was one particular tree that she sat under when the people came to her to have their cases and causes determined by her judgement, and for this reason the tree, became to be called by her name. However, some think it was given the name Deborah, because Rebekah's nurse (named Deborah) was also buried near Bethel under a tree.

- Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So he called its name Allon-bacuth. (Gen. 35:8).

The problem with this idea is that the tree in the story of Deborah the prophetess is said to be a palm tree, while the tree Rebekah's nurse was buried under was an oak tree, so it seems far more likely that they are two different trees.

**Between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim:** (v5), both Ramah and Bethel were places in the tribe of Benjamin in the borders of Ephraim. People from these territories and all parts of mount Ephraim came up to Deborah.

**Barak:** was a military commander from the tribe of Ephraim, who with Deborah, the prophetess the fourth Judge of Israel, defeated the Canaanite armies led by Sisera (Judges 4). Barak is listed in (Heb. 11) the Bible chapter known as "the great hall of faith," even though Deborah is the one exalted as defeating the armies of Sisera. Most suppose Barak is listed with others of great faith, because he was meek, recognised Deborah's authority before God and submitted to it, and he gave glory to God, when it would have been natural to want to seek his own fame because of the great military victory.

**Abinoam:** means "the (divine) father is pleasantness." He was from Kedesh-naphtali, and the father of Barak who defeated Jabin's army, led by Sisera. He is mentioned only three times (Judges 4:6) (Judges 4:12 and (Judges 5:12).

**Kedesh-naphtali:** (v6), situated little north of the Sea of Galilee. Probably mentioned here to distinguish it from the two places in Judah and Issachar with the same name.

**Mount Tabor:** (v6), was in the district of Issachar, about nine and a half kilometres from Nazareth situated in the borders of different tribes. The broad flat plain at the top of this beautiful and easily fortified mountain (which is nearly one and a half kilometres in circumference) would serve the double purpose of a watch-post and a stronghold, making a very suitable place for Balak to gather his army.

**The people of Naphtali and Zebulun:** (v6), these two places are probably mentioned first, because they were the two tribes closest to him and the enemy.

**Deborah sent and summoned Barak:** (v6), saying, "Has not the LORD," this is not the words of a weak woman, but one who is confident in her faith and her relationship with the LORD and her standing before Him. They are words that show she has total confidence that she is speaking as the voice of God, she doesn't ask Balak, but commands him to gather 10,000 of his men at Mount Tabor. For Balak to be able to gather 10,000 warriors together shows that he was a man of some authority and power himself, yet he considered Deborah, to be the greater. Since it was very unusual for a man of this ancient era to give a woman such high honour, we would be safe to suppose that Balak recognised God's Spirit was upon Deborah and respected and valued her authority more than his own honour.

**I will draw out Sisera:** (v7), Deborah tells Barak to gather 10,000, troops together, and when they are ready for war, she will entice Sisera and his armies out to the battlefield where Barak and his armies are gathered, ready, prepared and strengthened for war.

It is very likely Deborah would achieve this by going up with her armies against Sisera, then at some point in the battle, sound a trumpet for her army to flee, knowing the armies of Sisera desiring to utterly destroy Israel would chase after them, and in this way, she would draw them out to Barak and his army, who were waiting in readiness to attack Sisera. Should this not be the case, it is certain that Deborah and Barak had previously planned some similar deceptive military manoeuvre to draw the armies of Sisera out to trap and destroy them.

**Ten thousand men:** Barak was to gather from the tribe of Naphtali and Zebulun, which were near to each other and take them to Mount Tabor.

**TABOR, MOUNT** is about 15km west of the Sea of Galilee about 3½ km. wide. It is a dome-shaped mountain in the north east part of the Jezreel Valley. Though Mount Tabor it is only about 600 meters high it can be seen from a great distance as it stands alone as a striking mountain on the vast surrounding plain below, which gives rise to its renown.

Four facts concerning the mountain:

1. It served as a boundary point between the territories of the tribes of Zebulun, Naphtali and Issachar.
2. It was at this mountain that Barak at Deborah's command, gathered the armies of the northern tribes for battle. When the armies of Sisera approached the mountain from the south, the armies of the Israelites rushed down the slopes and defeated his armies. (Judges 4).
3. In Psalms the mountain is singled out for its beauty and mentioned together with Mt. Hermon:
  - The heavens are yours; the earth also is yours; the world and all that is in it, you have founded them. <sup>12</sup> The north and the south, you have created them; Tabor and Hermon joyously praise your name. (Psalm 89:11-12).
4. In Jeremiah it is described as outstanding among mountains and comparable to Mt. Carmel by the sea:
  - As I live, declares the King, whose name is the LORD of hosts, like Tabor among the mountains and like Carmel by the sea, shall one come. (Jer. 46:18).

It is probably for these reasons that Mount Tabor has played an important role throughout history (especially during biblical times).

**For Christians:** Mount Tabor is believed to be the place of the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ, where Jesus began to radiate light and spoke with Moses and Elijah.

**To the river Kishon:** (v7) is a seventy-kilometre-long stream in Israel. Its farthest source is the Gilboa mountains, and it flows in a west-north-westerly direction through the Jezreel Valley, emptying into the Haifa Bay in the Mediterranean Sea. It is sometimes referred to as the river, brook or stream of Kishon, depending upon the location that is in focus and the time of year (i.e., spring, autumn, summer or winter). It is often dry, but in early spring, after rain or the melting snow it can very suddenly and dangerously swell near Megiddo making its banks an impassable quagmire rendering chariots practically useless. The river is prominently mentioned in connection with Deborah and Barak's great victory, because it was to a great extent due to its banks turning into soft boggy ground that gives way underfoot making it almost impossible for chariots to pass over.

- Do to them (enemies of Israel) as you did to Midian, as to Sisera and Jabin at the river Kishon. (Psalm 83:9). (Psalm 83:9).

It is now called the Mukatta, (i.e., the river of slaughter).

- Elijah said to them, "Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape." And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there. (1 Kings 18:40).

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## BARAK AND DEBORAH GO TOGETHER

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### JUDGES 4:8-10

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- **Judges 4:8-10:** Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go." <sup>9</sup> And she said, "I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. <sup>10</sup> And Barak called out Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh. And 10,000 men went up at his heels, and Deborah went up with him.

The impending war seemed so daring that Barak asks Deborah to go with him, perhaps for the following three reasons:

1. He rightly thought that his armies would be inspired to see such a respected woman of great fame standing alongside him.

2. Should he need advice during the battle, having the presence of and inspired prophetess that he could call on would be a great advantage.
3. In the same way that some people of Israel believed they would be blessed if they had a Levite priest dwelling with them, he believed God would be more inclined to give Israel victory if he had an honourable prophetess of God with Him.

His respect and faith in her as a woman of God and his willingness to gather the 10,000 warriors together as she commanded, and his willingness to lead them into battle is no doubt a major reason he is praised in the hall of faith.

- And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets. (Hebrews 11:32).

**I will surely go with you:** (v9) when the humble and almost down-trodden position of women in the East is kept in mind, it is certain when a great warrior was told by a woman that the glory of his battle victory would be credited to a woman, he would not only feel humiliation, but also be greatly disappointed. However, it is very likely, Barak, may have thought that the woman was Deborah the great prophetess herself, which would no doubt greatly lessen any sense of humiliation and disappointment. We can only imagine how he felt when he discovered the woman was not Deborah, but Jael, the wife of a nomad chief.

Deborah made no hesitation, but agreed at once to go with Barak from the palm tree between Ramah and Bethel in Mount Ephraim, to Kedesh in Mount Naphtali, in order to raise up, inspire and encourage the ten thousand men that were gathered together and ready to fight against Sisera and his armies.

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## **JUDGES 4:11**

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- **Judges 4:11:** Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the Kenites, the descendants of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaananim (the plain of Zaanaim in KJV), which is near Kedesh.

**The Kenites:** the father-in-law of Moses, was Jethro, who was a Kenite, however, it is generally accepted that he also had the following names: Reuel, Jether, Hobab, Heber, Keni and Putiel. The Kenites were a people of the same origin and family that Jethro descended from. It seems they were of Midianite origin and descended from Abraham through Keturah

The children of Jethro are called, "Children of the Kenite" because they were the people Jethro descended from. The following verses show that the offspring of Jethro came into Canaan with the Israelites and remained with them (or at least a great part of them did).

Jethro visited Moses in the wilderness and then returned to his own country, but his son Hobab remained with Moses and travelled with him and Israel through the wilderness to Canaan were some of his descendants settled in various parts of the land. The name Kenites continued to the days of Jeremiah, after which they went by the name of Rechabites, from Rechab, a descendant of Jethro.

**The Kenites,** like all Bedouins (nomadic Arabs of the desert) loathed city life and avoided living in them except under absolute necessity as the following verses show:

- Then I (Jeremiah) set before the Rechabites pitchers full of wine, and cups, and I said to them, "Drink wine." <sup>6</sup> But they answered, "We will drink no wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, 'You shall not drink wine, neither you nor your

sons forever. <sup>7</sup> You shall not build a house; you shall not sow seed; you shall not plant or have a vineyard; but you shall live in tents all your days, that you may live many days in the land where you sojourn.’ (Jer. 35:1-7).

**Pitched his tent:** (v11) this statement carries the idea, that he possessed a great part of that country. It was not uncommon, for pastoral tribes to pitch their tents on vast fertile meadows with pools of water to feed their flocks, for these types of extensive meadows lay in the heart of inhabited countries in the East. Tents of the Bedouin are not like the bell-shaped tents that we are familiar with today, but coverings of black goats’ hair, sometimes supported on as many as nine poles. The Arab word for tent is *beit* (meaning house). The life and movements of the Kenites resembled those of gypsies, except the Kenites had flocks and herds. Even today Nomadic tribes in the East prefer to settle on pastoral lands with their flocks, rather than cities.

**The oak in Zaananim (the plain of Zaanaim in KJV)** (v11), the word oak in some Bibles is translated *Elon bezaananni*, it comes from the Hebrew word, (*elon*) and means tree, and can refer to a terebinth tree or an oak tree. Some translate the word oak as follows:

- The grove of oaks of Zaanaim.
- The terebinth in Zaanaim.

Great trees are often alluded to in Scripture, even today oaks and terebinth trees are still found abundantly in the neighbourhood of Kedesh. Such a fertile plain scattered with beautiful shady trees would be a natural camping-ground for the Kenites. With all this in mind, we are safe to conclude, the site of the camp was under a grove of oaks, or terebinths, in the upland valley of Kedesh.

**Zaanaim (also written Zaannanim):** (v11) the word Zaanaim means “wanderings” or “off-loading of tents.” It is located between Harosheth of the Gentiles, from where Sisera came from and Mount Tabor, where Barak was and most likely the place where Heber the Kenite had settled and pitched his tent.

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## SISERA CALLS FOR HIS 900 CHARIOTS

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### JUDGES 4:12-13

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- **Judges 4:12-13:** When Sisera was told that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, <sup>13</sup> Sisera called out all his chariots, 900 chariots of iron, and all the men who were with him, from Harosheth-hagoyim (Harosheth in KJV)

**Harosheth-hagoyim:** (Harosheth of the Gentiles in KJV): also called Harosheth of the nations (Judges 4:2), refers to a city near Hazor, in the northern part of Canaan, later known as Upper Galilee, or Galilee of the Gentiles, called this because of the multicultural character of its inhabitants. It was the home of Sisera, the general of the armies of Jabin, King of Canaan. (Judges 4:2).

**Hazor:** was the city of Jabin the king of Canaan (Judges 4:2) and one of the largest, most important biblical sites during the Canaanite and Israelite periods, it is given the title: “the head of all kingdoms.”

- Joshua turned back at that time and captured Hazor and struck its king with the sword, for Hazor formerly was the head of all those kingdoms. (Joshua 11:10).

This mighty city was an important link between the two strong empires of the ancient world: Egypt on the south, and Mesopotamia (Babylon, Assyria, Persia) on the north.

**The river of Kishon:** (known as the river of slaughter) is a 70 kilometres long river in Israel that flows into the Mediterranean Sea near the city of Haifa. Its farthest source is the Gilboa mountains, it flows in a west-

north-westerly direction through the Jezreel Valley emptying into the Haifa Bay in the Mediterranean Sea. Its drainage basin is around 1,100 square kilometres. A drainage basin (also called, catchment area, catchment basin, drainage area, river basin), refers to any area of land where drizzling, rain, sleet, snow, ice pellets and soft hail occurs, so that the falling water collects and drains off into a common area, such as a river bay, the sea or some other body of water. The drainage basin of the River Kishon includes much of the Jezreel Valley and Western Galilee, and parts of Mount Carmel. The river was near Mount Tabor where Barak and his 10,000 men had gathered. (Judges 4:6).

**Sisera was told that Barak had gone up to Mount Tabor:** (v12), he may have been informed by one of the following:

- Some of the Canaanites that dwelt near Tabor.
- Spies that Sisera had sent out.
- The Kenites who were at peace with Jabin (Judges 4:17).
- Disguised and secret messengers who Deborah may have sent amongst his people to spread the rumour that Barak was at Mount Tabor as part of her plan to draw Sisera and his armies out to Mount Tabor.

It is almost certain that when Sisera was told of the vast number of men of war that were with Barak at Mount Tabor, he would have presumed that Barak must have some plan to come against him. Being made aware of Barak's formidable army, Sisera would know that he would need all his forces to defeat Barak which would be why he gathered his 900 chariots together.

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## THE ARMIES OF SISERA ARE DEFEATED

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### JUDGES 4:14-16

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- **Judges 4:14-16:** And Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the LORD go out before you?" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him.<sup>15</sup> And the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword. And Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot.<sup>16</sup> And Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left.

Consider for a moment, Deborah and Barak are facing 900 chariots and a fierce army of trained and skilled warriors, and looking down at this fierce army, Deborah says to Barak, "the LORD has gone before you, He will give you the victory," these powerful words of faith, shine a spotlight on Deborah's great faith, for they are filled with absolute confidence in the LORD. Barak was not guided by futile divinations, but by a highly esteemed and respected prophetess of Israel. There is no doubt that her words would have given great encouragement to Barak and his army.

**Barak went down:** (v14) though Israel ten thousand men had no chariots they did not make use of the advantage which they had on the hill, where they would have been out of the reach of many of Sisera's iron chariots, but instead took on the aggressive position and boldly rushed down into the plain against the mass of Sisera's terrifying forces.

**With the edge of the sword:** (v15) referring to the swords of Barak and his army. Though the specific details of this battle are not recorded, the following words of Deborah's song may imply that something extraordinary led to Jabin's defeat.

- From heaven the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera. (Judges 5:20).

Though the stars in this song refer to the warriors of Israel, it is not necessary to limit them to Israel's army only, for it is likely The LORD used thunder and lightning to strike Jabins with terror and confusion as he did with the Philistines:

- And the LORD threw them into a panic before Israel, who struck them with a great blow at Gibeon and chased them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah. (Joshua 10:10).
- As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the LORD thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel. (1 Samuel 7:10).

**Sisera got down from his chariot and fled:** (v15), it may also be that rain had made the ground such a muddy quagmire that the wheels of the chariot got bogged down, rendering them practically useless for battle. This maybe the reason (though there are others) that Sisera, got down from his chariot to flee on foot, especially, Considering the following allusion in the song of Deborah to the swollen waters of the Kishon river and the storm:

- The torrent Kishon swept them away, the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon. March on, my soul, with might! (Judges 5:21).

It also maybe likely that not only were the wheels of Sisera's chariot bogged in mud, because of much rain, but also that the river of Kishon overflowed and flooded the plains of Mount Tabor rendering the wheels of all 900 chariots useless, which upon seeing this maybe why Barak and his 10.000 men charged down onto the open plain.

The idea that something extraordinary led to Jabins defeat is made even more likely when it is considered Deborah told Barak, "the LORD will go before you," (v15) and we are told, "the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army," (v15). It appears that all Barak and his 10,000 men had to do was to chase and kill those who God, had put into confusion, fear and flight.

**NOTE:** no mention is made of Deborah's coming down with them, perhaps she stayed on the mountain until the battle was over.

**Deborah the prophetess:** Deborah's prophetic words, prior to this battle, "for this is the day in which the LORD has delivered Sisera into thine hand," clearly shows that she was a true prophetess of God. She knew this was the exact day, that Israel's deliverance would be brought about, and speaks of it as if it was past, because of the absolute confidence and full assurance she had in her communion with the LORD. Added to this she had also told Barak that Sisera would be sold (i.e., delivered) into the hands of a woman (v9) which also came to pass, for Jael, a woman drove a peg through his head that very day. (v21). The armies of Sisera were given into the hands of Barak, while their commander was given into the hands of Jael, a woman. This great battle proves the truth contained in the following verses:

- Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God. (Psalm 20:7).
- The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.  
<sup>17</sup> The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue. (Psalm 33:16-17).
- The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the LORD. (Proverbs 21:31).

- **Judges 4:17-20:** But Sisera fled away on foot 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. <sup>18</sup> And Jael came out to meet Sisera and said to him, “Turn aside, my lord; turn aside to me; do not be afraid.” So he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. <sup>19</sup> And he said to her, “Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.” So she opened a skin of milk and gave him a drink and covered him. <sup>20</sup> And he said to her, “Stand at the opening of the tent, and if any man comes and asks you, ‘Is anyone here?’ say, ‘No.’”

There was peace not a league or covenant of friendship, but only a cessation of hostilities. During these ancient times it was common for women to live in a separate tent from their husbands:

- Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother. (Gen. 24:67).
- So Laban went into Jacob’s tent and into Leah’s tent and into the tent of the two female servants, but he did not find them. And he went out of Leah’s tent and entered Rachel’s. (Genesis 31:33).

Following are some reasons Sisera may have chosen to go to her tent:

- The Kenites were not Israelites, and were a quiet people not inclined to war, nor did they make any claim to the country, for they only lived in tents, raising their flocks.
- There was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.
- They were not Israelites and were a peaceable people, abhorring war.
- He thought that he would be safer in a woman’s tent, thinking it would be less likely to be searched.

**Turn in to me:** it is possible Sisera had thrown off any garments that would give away his identity so as not to be recognised by the enemy and killed, and that Jael never recognised him, and therefore thought she was simply inviting a stranger in need into her tent according to nomadic custom.

**If any man asks, “is anyone here?” say, “No.”** During this age and among these nations, and under such circumstances, a lie would have been regarded as justifiable, especially if it was to save a life. Whether it is thought that this is right or wrong, it would be unfair to judge the actions of uninformed nomads and idolatrous Canaanites, more than a thousand years before Christ. However, it should be noted, she gave no promise to do so.

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## Jael Kills Sisera with a Tent Peg

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### JUDGES 4:21-22

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- **Judges 4:21-22:** But Jael the wife of Heber took a tent peg, and took a hammer in her hand. Then she went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple until it went down into the ground while he was lying fast asleep from weariness. So he died. <sup>22</sup> And behold, as Barak was pursuing Sisera, Jael went out to meet him and said to him, “Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.” So he went in to her tent, and there lay Sisera dead, with the tent peg in his temple.

The peg was probably a common wooden or iron tent-peg used to fasten down the cords that kept the tent in its place. There is no question the description of Sisera’s murder is exceedingly graphic, but in the context of war, and thousands of men being slaughtered with swords on a battle field in one day, it simply manifests the blood thirsty culture of this ancient era. To defend an act of assassination there have been religious men that have assumed that Jael received a Divine unction to do what she did, but

this is totally speculative, and those who make such speculations should not attempt to force their "personal interpretations" on others. Others claim that Jael's act violates all the law of nomadic hospitality and friendship, and of the peace which was established between Sisera and Jael.

1. Though we are told there was peace between Jael and Sisera, it does not mean they had an alliance of friendship but only a cessation of acts of hostility between them.
2. Sisera, though for the time pretended to be a friend, was in fact a bitter and merciless enemy to God, and all His people, and therefore to Jael herself.

**SNAP SHOT:** it should be said, that Jael's murderous act cannot be used to justify such acts today. Even though Jael's act is a gross abuse of the covenant we live under today, various ruthless men who profess Christ have in past generations defended assassination by assuming that Jael's act that brought about the death of a powerful and fierce enemy of God's people sanctioned the murder of others. But such methods of reasoning and reaching such conclusions on the interpretation of a text to justify our crimes, undermines the very principals of good Bible study and its application. When this kind of application of a text is applied, it leaves those who embrace them open to the grossest abuses of mankind, and a means to cover the most horrific and cruel offences and law-breaking. Following are just two examples:

1. When Jacques Clement asked whether a priest could kill a tyrant, he was told that, "it was not a mortal sin, but only an irregularity."
2. When Pope Paul V. heard of the murder of Henry IV. by Ravailac, he said, "The God of nations did this, because he was given over to a reprobate mind."

It has always been a principal of the devil to misquote Scripture for his purpose, and to use the lips of those who profess to teach it. A famous professor stated, "Worse than the sword, is misquoted scripture and doctrine built from man's reasoning, for the sword will only kill the body, but false doctrine will kill the soul." Acts of violence and cunning, done during the Old Testament when culture and human society commended such acts, and thought them right are very different from the same acts done in the New Testament age when consciences have been enlightened and when the law of the land has established justice systems and the law of nations give individuals security.

It is right and proper to credit Jael, with courage and passion for God's people. But in doing so, we should not be blind to this story being used by ruthless men to justify criminal acts, that fly in the face of the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Sisera lay dead:** (v22) the glory of having slain a famous and exalted general of a fierce and powerful enemy was set upon a woman as Deborah the prophetess had foretold prior to this battle, saying:

- I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. (Judges 4:9).

Both parts of Deborah's prophecy concerning Sisera were perfectly fulfilled. Sisera was delivered into the hand of Barak, according to Deborah's prophecy (Judges 4:7), but not alive, and therefore not to Barak's honour, as was foretold (Judges 4:9). For, when he came into Jael's tent, Sisera lay dead and was therefore literally delivered into the hand of a woman.

- **Judges 4:23-24:** So on that day God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan before the people of Israel. <sup>24</sup> And the hand of the people of Israel pressed harder and harder against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

The words, "God subdued Jabin king of Canaan," mean He freed Israel from subjection to him and delivered him into the hands of the Israelites.

**Israel pressed harder and harder against Jabin:** (v24) Barak's great victory was the beginning of a successful resistance against Jabin the king of Canaan, for Israel continued the war against him until they had put him to death and taken his cities and destroyed the inhabitants of them, according to the declared will of God, that they should not spare the Canaanites, but destroy them, by which the Israelites recovered their independence, and finally broke the Canaanite power. From this time forward, we hear no more of Canaanite domination in the Book of Judges.

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*As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.*

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