

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 4

Vv. 1- 9 *The rise of Deborah and Barak.* Deborah was a prophetess. As a woman, she demurred to lead Israel without the assistance of some capable man. Barak, of Zebulun, came to her

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assistance, Together they wrought deliverance against Jabin, king of Hazor, who was oppressing Israel in their day.

Vv. 10-17 *The battle with Sisera.* Sisera was the captain of the Canaanite army under Jabin, king of Hazor. He had nine hundred chariots of iron under his command. This superior equipment for warfare struck terror into the hearts of the warriors of Israel, since most of them were without any particular military training and largely without military equipment.

Vv. 18-24 *The death of Sisera.* Jael, wife of Heber, the Kenite, caught Sisera off-guard as he accepted her offer of hospitality and lay asleep in her tent. Without the usual weapons of war, she was able to slay the captain of the Canaanite army, who had struck terror into the hearts of the thousands of Israel through many years. This bold stroke signaled the beginning of a series of victories which ultimately resulted in the driving of Jabin away from the borders of Israel.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1, *Who can find a worthy woman?* This was the question of Solomon in Proverbs 31:10. The rise of Deborah, the prophetess, to a place of leadership in Israel typifies the place of importance played by women of every age. No nation can rise any higher than the women in her midst. No church is any stronger than those good women who train up children in the way that they ought to go. No home is any better than the mothers who rock the cradles within their walls. God

created woman as a helpmeet for man, and worthy women have played this role well throughout the centuries.

2. *This is the day!* Deborah challenged Barak by saying, "Up; for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand" (verse 14) . The Apostle Paul cried out: "Now is the accepted time; today is the day of salvation" (II Corinthians 6:2). Those who serve God must never lose their sense of urgency, for His work must be done while it is day; the night comes when no man can work.
3. *Prosperous hands prevail.* The original text of this passage is written in a very significant way. A literal translation would be something to the effect that the hand of the sons of Israel "going, went, and was hard" against Jabin, king of the Canaanites. There is no suggestion that the hands of the Israelites were rich, the usual connotation of prosperity. The Israelites had a will to work and to fight. Their hands were busy—"they put their hands to the plow." They were unified in their purpose, and God blessed them. They won a significant victory over their enemies to the north.

Deborah and Barak Delivered Israel 4:1-5:31

The Rise of Deborah 4:1-9

And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, when Ehud was dead.

2 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.

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.

4 And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time,

5 And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Beth-el in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

6 And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali, 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?

7 And I will draw unto thee, to the river Kishon, Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand.

8 And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go.

9 And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honor; for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh.

1. *What evil did Israel do after Ehud was dead? 4:1*

In the absence of any mention of a specified type of evil, we conclude that the Israelites continued to worship the Baalim and Ashtaroth. They undoubtedly continued to intermarry among these pagan peoples and were led deeper and deeper into the slough of syncretistic practices. They relaxed their efforts to subdue their enemies and to drive out the Canaanites who lived in the land. As a result, they were easy preys for the Canaanites.

2. *Who was Jabin? 4:2, 3, (cf. Joshua 11:1, 4)*

Joshua fought against a king by that name near the same site in his day. Jabin may have been a standing title

given to the ruler of this area. Many of the kings of the surrounding areas had titles which were given to successive rulers. For example, the kings in Egypt were called Pharaohs. At least two kings in Judah's territory bore the title, Adoni, or "lord"—Adonizedek, king of Jerusalem, and Adoni-bezek, ruler in Bezek. We are not surprised then to read about a Jabin in the days of Joshua, and another at this later date.

3. *Where was Hazor? 4:2*

Hazor was a chief city of north Palestine. It was situated near Lake Huleh. It is known primarily as the seat of Jabin, this powerful Canaanitish king. He was the one who led in the northern coalition as the kings attacked Joshua (Joshua 11:1 ff.) . The Bible narrative says Hazor stood on a "tell" (Joshua 11:13) , but the surrounding territory was flat, and suitable for the use of chariots. Nine hundred of these were under the command of Sisera in the days of Deborah and Barak. Hazor had been assigned to the tribe of Naphtali (Joshua 19:36) and remained in their possession after Jabin was driven out.

4. *What is the meaning of "sold"? 4:2*

God delivered them to their enemies. This kind of terminology suggests God's putting a price on the people of Israel, but in actuality their being delivered into the hands of their enemies was a direct result of their "selling" themselves into the worship of false gods. They "sold" themselves into slavery to the idolatrous practices of the Canaanite peoples, among whom they made marriages and whose pagan gods they revered.

5. *Who was Deborah? 4:4*

Deborah has been called "the Sibyl of Mount Ephraim." She was an Ephraimite woman, and like Miriam (Exodus 15:20) and Huldah (II Kings 22:14), she rose to a place of leadership and respect among the people of Israel. Her song, which is recorded in Judges Five, is one

of the great songs of triumph preserved for us in the Word of God, Since her utterances show an insight into the affairs of men which is above the normal, we believe she was inspired of God; and her song of victory is often compared with the odes of Miriam (Exodus 15) , Hannah (I Samuel 2) and Mary (Luke 1) ,

6. *Why was a woman in authority? 4:4*

She was a "prophetess," one evidently enjoying the charismatic gift. In other words, God had chosen her. We are also led to believe there was a lack of men to take the leadership. Even Barak was willing to lead only when he was summoned by Deborah and challenged by her to take immediate action. In the beginning God made woman to be a helpmeet for man. Woman was not given the preeminence by nature; but when men fail to lead in the cause of righteousness, women are certainly within their rights to stand fast in their convictions and to challenge others to join them.

7. *What judging did she do, and where? 4:5*

Her judging was done in the hill country of _____
Ephraim _____

over all Israel. We are led to believe her influence was felt in all Israel because the statement is made that "the children of Israel" came up to her for judgment. We are further led in this direction because of the fact of her calling Barak who was a resident of the tribe of Naphtali, the northernmost of Israel's tribe. If her influence had been only local, she would hardly have been able to summon Barak from the north; nor would it be recorded that "the

children of Israel" came up to her for judgment. From her vantage point in the hill country north of Jerusalem, she was able to reach north, east, south, and west as she championed the cause of righteousness. The reading of the text does not suggest that she rode in a circuit as Samuel did (I Samuel

7:15-17). Instead of moving about

from place to place, she remained quietly at home; and the children of Israel sought out her wisdom. They recognized that the Spirit of God was upon her and that as a prophetess she was able to help them to know the will of God for their lives. Her "court" was a palm tree which stood between Ramah and Bethel, little more than ten miles north of Jerusalem.

8. *Why call the soldiers from Naphtali and Zebulun?* 4:6

They were the closest to the site of the battle. These were not the only tribes who assisted in the battle. In her song Deborah makes mention of Benjamin, Machir (Manasseh) , Zebulun, and Issachar (Judges 5:14, 15) . She evidently summoned all of the tribes because she chided those who lived beyond the Jordan for not coming. She also rebuked Dan and Asher for not assisting (Judges 5:16, 17). Deborah must have known that Barak was a righteous and capable man. She wanted his assistance. His being of the tribe of Naphtali naturally led to the

most direct appeal being made to his tribe and their neighbors, Zebulun (4:6) .

9. *Where were the river Kishon and mount Tabor?* 4:6, 7

The Kishon River ran along the foot of Mount Carmel. Mount Tabor was at the east end of the Plain of Jezreel. The word Kishon means "bending" or "winding." The river *is* also described as the waters of Megiddo (Judges 5:19) . This stream is a torrent; that is, it rises and runs fast in the rainy, winter season. The river takes its rise near Mount Tabor, and runs in a northeasterly direction through the plains of Esdraelon, emptying into the Mediterranean Sea near the base of Mount Carmel. There are two channels of the stream which unite just a few miles north of Megiddo. At this point the stream *is* deep and miry, and the ground for some distance on each side is low and marshy. During the winter it *is* difficult to ford

the Kishon, and sometimes after a heavy rain it is impassable. The modern name *Nahr el Mukatta* signifies the river of slaughter." Probably this name arose from the slaying of the priests of Baal in the days of Elijah which occurred here (I Kings 18:40) as well as from the battle fought here in the days of Deborah.

Barak's Aid to Deborah 4:10-16

10 And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet and Deborah went up with him.

11 Now Heber the Kenite, which was of the children of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, had severed himself from the Kenites, and pitched his tent unto the plain of Zaanaim, which is by Kedesh.

12 And they showed Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam was gone up to mount Tabor.

13 And Sisera gathered together all his chariots, even nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people that were with him, from Harosheth of the Gentiles unto the river of Kishon.

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.

15 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.

16 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.

10. From where had Heber come? 4:11

Heber was, one of the Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' father-in-law. They had come to Canaan with Israel and settled first in Judah, whence some evidently migrated to the north. Heber had left the main body of his people and had traveled quite a distance to take up his residence at Zaanaim, a town near Kadesh. Kadesh was a city of refuge, but there *is* no indication that Heber had fled for refuge to this point. His home was near the home of Barak, and he was sympathetic with the cause of the Israelites as they fought against Jabin.

11. Why flee on foot? 4:15

The chariots were hampered. In the battle the chariots may have bogged down in the marshy land which surrounded the river, making them ineffective. Furthermore, as the battle was going against the Canaanites, Sisera probably felt he should escape alone and hide among the hills which were on all sides of the valley. He, thus, made his way out of the area and came to the home of Heber. Naturally, a man in a chariot would be much more conspicuous than an individual walking alone through the fields and forests of the countryside.

The Death of Sisera 4:17-24

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.

18 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.

19 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.

20 Again he said unto her, Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and inquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No.

21 Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took a 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.

22 And, behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said unto him, Come, and I will show thee the man whom thou seekest. And when he came into her tent, behold, Sisera lay dead, and the nail was in his temples.

23 So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel.

24 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.

12. What was Jael's motive? 4:17

Jael wanted to aid Israel's cause. Jael was not proposing any lewd act on the part of Sisera. When she invited him into her tent, she was not trying to propose any indecent act on her part. She did have in mind evidently that she would be able to bring about the capture of the enemy captain. Such courageous feats are accomplished often by women who are aroused over injustice and oppression brought on their communities by harsh rulers. Jael has won a place in the hearts of righteous people through the centuries as they have read of her being moved to slay the enemy captain.

13. What kind of a bottle contained the milk? 4:19

This very interesting incidental reference to the way in which milk was kept is unique in the Scripture. The bottle was undoubtedly either some kind of a jug made of

clay, or a pouch made from the skin of an animal. This was a very gracious act of hospitality. Sisera had asked only for a little water to drink. He was thirsty as he had fled from the battle, and Jael had given him more than he had asked. She offered him milk which would give him strength as well as slake his thirst.

14. What kind of a nail was used? 4:21

Since the Canaanites were in possession of chariots of iron, Jael would undoubtedly have had possession of a nail of iron. Some feel that a wooden tent peg was used. In any case, it was of large size because she was able to drive it not only through Sisera's head but into the ground beneath his head. Such pegs were necessary to support the tents pitched by nomadic people. Fierce winds would flatten their places of abode if the cords were not held taut by pegs or "nails" driven firmly into the earth.

15. In what way was Jabin subdued? 4:23

The Scripture says that God subdued Jabin that day. God fought for Israel as has been said in many passages of Scripture. At the same time, it is recorded that the hand of the children of Israel was hard against Jabin. They pursued him until they had utterly destroyed him. His chariots of iron were not enough to bring him victory as he fought against the Lord's people. The smashing blow dealt him in this battle broke the hard hand of oppression in which he had held Israel.

TEN QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER 4

1. Who oppressed Israel in Deborah's day?
2. Where was his capital?
3. Over what people did he rule?
4. Who was his captain?
5. Between what two cities was Deborah's home?
6. Who helped Deborah?

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7. In which tribe was his home?
8. Near what river was the battle fought?
9. What was the name of the woman who killed the enemy captain?
- 10, Who was her husband?