

Judges 4 – The Story of Deborah, Jael and Sisera

The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, after Ehud died. So the Lord sold them into the hand of King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-ha-goim.

Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help; for he had nine hundred chariots of iron, and had oppressed the Israelites cruelly for twenty years.

At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgement.

She sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, **'The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you,** "Go, take position at Mount Tabor, bringing ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand." ' 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.' 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 got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and ten thousand warriors went up behind him; and Deborah went up with him.

Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the other Kenites, that is, the descendants of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had encamped as far away as Elon-bezaananim, which is near Kedesh.

When Sisera was told that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, Sisera called out all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the troops who were with him, from Harosheth-ha-goim to the Wadi Kishon.

Then Deborah said to Barak, **'Up! For this is the day on which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand. The Lord is indeed going out before you.'** So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand warriors following him. And the Lord threw Sisera and all his chariots and all his army into a panic before Barak; Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot, while Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth-ha-goim. All the army of Sisera fell by the sword; no one was left.

Now Sisera had fled away on foot to the tent of Jael wife of Heber the Kenite; for there was peace between King Jabin of Hazor and the clan of Heber the Kenite. **Jael came out to meet Sisera, and said to him, ‘Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; have no fear.’**

So he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. Then 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. **He said to her, ‘Stand at the entrance of the tent, and if anybody comes and asks you, “Is anyone here?” say, “No.” ’**

But Jael wife of Heber took a tent-peg, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, until it went down into the ground—he was lying fast asleep from weariness—and he died. Then, as Barak came in pursuit of 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 into her tent; and there was Sisera lying dead, with the tent-peg in his temple.

So on that day God subdued King Jabin of Canaan before the Israelites. Then the hand of the Israelites bore harder and harder on King Jabin of Canaan, until they destroyed King Jabin of Canaan.

Judges 5 - The Song of Deborah

Then Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying:
‘When locks are long in Israel, when the people offer themselves willingly—
bless the Lord!

‘Hear, O kings; give ear, O princes; to the Lord I will sing,
I will make melody to the Lord, the God of Israel.

‘Lord, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens poured, the clouds indeed poured water. The mountains quaked before the Lord, the One of Sinai, before the Lord, the God of Israel.

‘In the days of Shamgar son of Anath, in the days of Jael, caravans ceased and travellers kept to the byways. The peasantry prospered in Israel, they grew fat on plunder, because you arose, Deborah, arose as a mother in Israel.

When new gods were chosen, then war was in the gates.
Was shield or spear to be seen among forty thousand in Israel?
My heart goes out to the commanders of Israel
 who offered themselves willingly among the people.
Bless the Lord.

‘Tell of it, you who ride on white donkeys, you who sit on rich carpets,
 and you who walk by the way.
To the sound of musicians at the watering-places,
 there they repeat the triumphs of the Lord,
 the triumphs of his peasantry in Israel.

‘Then down to the gates marched the people of the Lord.

‘Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, utter a song!

Arise, Barak, lead away your captives, O son of Abinoam.
Then down marched the remnant of the noble;
 the people of the Lord marched down for him against the mighty.
From Ephraim they set out into the valley,
 following you, Benjamin, with your kin;
from Machir marched down the commanders,
 and from Zebulun those who bear the marshal’s staff;
the chiefs of Issachar came with Deborah, and Issachar faithful to Barak;
 into the valley they rushed out at his heels.

Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings of heart.
Why did you tarry among the sheepfolds, to hear the piping for the flocks?

Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings of heart.
Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan; and Dan, why did he abide with the ships?
Asher sat still at the coast of the sea, settling down by his landings.
Zebulun is a people that scorned death;
 Naphtali too, on the heights of the field.

‘The kings came, they fought; then fought the kings of Canaan,
at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo; they got no spoils of silver.
The stars fought from heaven, from their courses they fought against Sisera.
The torrent Kishon swept them away,
 the onrushing torrent, the torrent Kishon.

March on, my soul, with might!
'Then loud beat the horses' hoofs
with the galloping, galloping of his steeds.

'Curse Meroz, says the angel of the Lord,
curse bitterly its inhabitants,
because they did not come to the help of the Lord,
to the help of the Lord against the mighty.

**'Most blessed of women be Jael,
the wife of Heber the Kenite,
of tent-dwelling women most blessed.
He asked water and she gave him milk,
she brought him curds in a lordly bowl.
She put her hand to the tent-peg
and her right hand to the workmen's mallet;
she struck Sisera a blow,
she crushed his head,
she shattered and pierced his temple.
He sank, he fell,
he lay still at her feet;
at her feet he sank, he fell;
where he sank, there he fell dead.**

**'Out of the window she peered,
the mother of Sisera gazed through the lattice:
"Why is his chariot so long in coming?
Why tarry the hoofbeats of his chariots?"
Her wisest ladies make answer,
indeed, she answers the question herself:
"Are they not finding and dividing the spoil?—
A girl or two for every man;
spoil of dyed stuffs for Sisera,
spoil of dyed stuffs embroidered,
two pieces of dyed work embroidered for my neck as spoil?"**

**'So perish all your enemies, O Lord!
But may your friends be like the sun as it rises in its might.'**

And the land had rest for forty years.