

“A Smashing Salvation”¹ (Judges 4–5)

Someone has said there are only three kinds of people in the world—those who watch things happen, those who make things happen, and those who scratch their heads and ask, “Hey, what’s happening?” The ability to make things happen is the gift of leadership.² Leadership is needed in every sphere of life. Our country needs leadership to lead us forward in the 21st century. Our churches need leadership to lead the world to Christ. Our homes need leadership to transfer truth to the next generation. Leadership is paramount! Yet, as important as human leadership is God’s leadership is most essential, for apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5).

In Judges 4–5,³ we will learn about two godly female leaders who perform legendary exploits for God. These two women are leaders who are willing to risk life and limb for God’s purposes. They are women of courage. In this account, our author reveals that *God intervenes when we act with courageous faith*. Chapter 4 contains two acts: Act 1 focuses on Deborah’s victory (4:1–16), and Act 2 on Jael’s victory (4:17–24). Chapter 5, then, is a victory song by Deborah that provides us insight into chapter 4.

Act 1: Deborah’s victory (4:1–16). Our story begins in 4:1 on a tragic, but familiar note. “**Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, after Ehud died.**”⁴ After Ehud gutted the “fat calf” Eglon (3:20–22), God gave His people eighty years of peace (3:30). This is the longest period of peace recorded in the Book of Judges. But once Ehud dies, the people return to their evil (see 2:10–19). This verse tells us something about sin. It is difficult to be creative in sin. There’s a certain monotony about it; most all of that has been done before; it is simply that we do the same thing again.⁵ Sin is a boring routine, not a fresh excitement. The fast lane becomes an old rut. Evil never lends itself to originality. Hence, there are two problems: the slavery and the staleness of sin.⁶ Today, you may have a stronghold of anger in your life. You express this anger to your spouse, kids, and coworkers. It feels good to fly off the handle and vent your frustrations. However, when the dust settles you feel awful inside and you can’t take your words back. Perhaps you are guilty of overeating. The food tastes great going down, but when your stomach is filled to the point of overflowing you feel guilty. Maybe you are addicted to Internet pornography. The immediate rush that your flesh feels is glorious, but then the Holy Spirit convicts you and you realize that this sin will destroy your marriage, family, and ministry. All of these sins follow the cyclical pattern of sin in the Book of Judges. They are repetitious, monotonous, and destructive.

The Book of Judges is like a broken record. God shows His grace and His people rebel. The cycle repeats itself over and over and over again. It makes one wonder, how can I ensure that after my death the next generation lives righteous and godly lives? This is a question every church must ask because we are just one generation away from extinction. We must begin with desperate prayer: “Lord, may my children, grandchildren, and disciples walk with you until they see you face-to-face.” It is also critical to follow up prayer with action! As a church our vision is “transferring truth to the next generation.” You must own this vision. It must preoccupy your thoughts, time, and energy. Right now, who are you investing your life into? Like Ehud, one day you will die. Who will pick up the baton of faith and run? To put it another way, if the future of Christianity depended on your investment in others, would Christianity live to see another day? *God intervenes when we act with courageous faith*.

In 4:2–3, Israel’s rebellion requires God to act. “**And the LORD sold them [Israel] into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan,⁷ who reigned in Hazor;⁸ and the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim [lit. the woodlands of the nations]. The sons of Israel cried to the LORD; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years.**”⁹ God loves His idolatrous people enough to discipline them with idolaters. He lovingly preys on their insecurities by raising up Jabin and Sisera along with their nine hundred iron chariots.¹⁰ Through the use of this powerful technology the Canaanites rule over Israel for twenty long years.

Our story picks up steam in 4:4–5. We are introduced to Deborah and learn a little bit about who she is. **“Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging¹¹ Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment.”¹²** God raises up a courageous woman named Deborah to be Israel’s judge.¹³ Deborah’s name means “honeybee” for she does what most marks a bee. She stings the enemy, and she brings sweet refreshment to her people.¹⁴ Deborah is also called “the wife of Lappidoth,” which means “woman of torches.” This is quite apropos since she will shortly light a fire under Barak and demonstrate conquering power, which torches symbolize (cf. 5:7; Isa 62:1; Dan 10:6; Zech 12:6).¹⁵

Now that we know who Deborah is, we must determine exactly what she does. In 4:6–7, we discover that Deborah **“sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-*naphtali*, and said to him, ‘Behold, the LORD, the God of Israel, has commanded,¹⁶ ‘Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of *Naphtali* and from the sons of *Zebulun*. I will draw out to you *Sisera*, the commander of *Jabin*’s army, with his chariots and his many troops to the river *Kishon*, and I will give him into your hand.’”** It is important to note that 4:6 is a question.¹⁷ The NASB provides a margin note offering an alternative translation (“Has not...commanded...?”) This question is a better rendering of 4:6. It ought to be translated, “Has not the Lord, the God of Israel, commanded that you should march to Mount Tabor?” Deborah is not telling Barak anything that he does not already know. She calls Barak to Bethel to remind him of the truth that he already possesses. God has been speaking to Barak. His home was Kedesh-*naphtali*. “Kedesh” means sanctuary. Evidently there was a holy site there in *Naphtali*, and there may have been a very small glimmer of truth and light there. In any case, Barak knows the truth. He knows that he should be a man of faith. He knows that God can deliver Israel, but he is impotent, powerless, and afraid to act. Deborah is calling him to go back to what he knows is true, and to act on it.

In 4:8, we come upon a verse that should hurt every man. **“Then Barak said to her, ‘If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.’”** Initially, it seems like Barak is a pantywaist, girly-man. He seems to be the ultimate coward.¹⁸ Now, admittedly, this preaches well; however, it is not the best understanding. Rather, it appears that Barak wants Deborah to accompany him so that he can be assured of God’s presence.¹⁹ He also likely wants the prophetess with him so that he can consult with her as he has need.²⁰ While this sounds somewhat reasonable,²¹ the problem is God’s will has already been revealed to Barak, and he is reluctant to act on the command he has received.²² The will of God is clear, but Barak puts a condition on obeying God.

Barak (“lightning”) is told where to go, how many men to take with him, and even what tribes they are to come from. He is told that he is to provoke *Sisera* to attack, descending from Mount Tabor to the plain near the river *Kishon*, and there God will deliver him into Barak’s hand. There is nothing more that Barak needs to know. He does not need Deborah to accompany him for any further guidance, nor does he require her presence to obtain a following or a victory. Nevertheless, he thinks he needs Deborah to come along with him, even though he has God’s promise of victory.

It’s easy to be passive like Barak when we receive God’s commands. For Barak, the command was to lead the Israelite army against *Jabin*’s army. For you, it might be God’s call for you to discipline your children, to train up your children in the way of wisdom. But you slink from the task. You’re afraid to set boundaries. You’re reluctant to hold your child to standards. You don’t have the courage to say, “We’re not going to watch this television program in our home.” You hesitate to say, “There’s a song on this CD we’re not going to allow in our home.” There’s no way you’re going to announce, “You can’t go out with this boy or with this girl.”²³ It is so easy to say to your wife, “Honey, will you talk to the kids?” “Will you discipline the kids?” As men, it is so easy to be lazy and passive. We can often lack faith when God has called us to lead. Today, will you recommit yourself to being the spiritual leader God wants you to be?

God merely asks that you take one step forward in obedience. He is looking for you to have courageous faith. When you do so, God promises that He will intervene. After all, when God wants to glorify Himself through His people, He always has a perfect plan for us to follow. In the case of Barak, God chose the leader of His army, the place for the battle, and the plan for His army to follow. God also guaranteed the victory.²⁴ Similarly, we know that “God’s commandments are God’s enablements” and that we should obey His will in spite of circumstances, feelings, or consequences.

After Barak’s classic ultimatum, Deborah replies in 4:9–10: **“I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the honor shall not be yours on the journey that you are about to take, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman.”**²⁵ **Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali together to Kedesh, and ten thousand men went up with him; Deborah also went up with him.** This is a beautiful response from Deborah. She does not ridicule Barak or “call him out” by questioning his manhood. She doesn’t nag, command, or insist. Nor does she attempt to manipulate him. Instead, she merely reminds him of his responsibility before God. Deborah uses the carrot approach and reminds Barak that God wanted to honor him. But due to his lack of faith, a woman will be honored in his place. Even so, Deborah promises to support Barak and go with him into battle.

Perhaps you can relate to this episode between Deborah and Barak because you are married to a spiritually passive man. In the past, have you ever turned on Christian radio or television hoping that your husband will be convicted by a sermon? Have you ever given your husband a book on how to be a godly man? Have you ever put a tract on his pillow hoping he will read it before bed? Have you ever been guilty of telling your husband that you wish he was more like [insert a godly man]? Although these attempts may be well-intentioned, they are fruitless. If anything, you will drive your husband further away. The best thing you can do is simply pray for your husband and exude a gentle and quiet spirit (1 Pet 3:1–6). Like Deborah, if you then seek ways to support your husband and be an encouragement to him, the Lord can do great things in your man.

The contrast between Deborah and Barak suggests that God raises up a woman to lead Israel because the Israelite men were cowards and declined leadership. Barak, though a gifted warrior, is tainted by his lack of faith and shamed for it. The honor of killing the enemy commander in battle will go to a woman. Verse 9 keeps us in suspense. Who will be the woman who gets the honor? At this point, we assume that it will be Deborah herself. Act 2 will give us... “the rest of the story.” But the point is: In the absence of manly men, the Lord uses heroic women.²⁶ Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Barak did have faith. In fact, he is included in the “hall of faith” (Heb 11:32). But then again so was Samson! Both of these men were believers in Yahweh, but their faith was not as strong as it should have been. What a great reminder that God can use weak and sinful people like you and me.

Before we continue our story and learn about Israel’s victory,²⁷ there is a “speed bump” in 4:11. It seems like a non sequitur, but there is a hint of what is to come. **“Now Heber the Kenite had separated himself from the Kenites, from the sons of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaananim, which is near Kedesh.”** This verse suggests that Heber is a defector. Instead of cooperating with Israel he has moved north and is dangerously close to God’s enemies. There will be more to come in Act 2.

In 4:12–13, the author of Judges continues his story: **“Then they [the Canaanite troops] told Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor. Sisera called together all his chariots, nine hundred iron chariots, and all the people who were with him, from Harosheth-hagoyim to the river Kishon.”** Sisera must have said, “I’m going to kick tail and take names.” He is pumped because he knows he is going to be able to obliterate Israel. After all, he has over nine hundred iron chariots, thousands of foot soldiers, and an arsenal of weapons. Furthermore, it is sometime between June–September. The weather is beautiful and the time is right to continue his twenty-year domination of Israel.

Yet, 4:14 marks a turning point in this chapter. Deborah moves from posing a question and speaking a prophetic word to issuing a war cry. She says to Barak: “**Arise! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hands; behold, the LORD has gone out before you.’ So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him.**” Like an ancient Joan of Arc, Deborah calls the people to battle, leading them out of idolatry and restoring their dignity as God’s chosen ones.²⁸ Not once, but twice, Deborah informs Barak that it is the Lord who is going to bring victory. It is not Deborah, Barak, or Israel; it is the Lord who will win this battle! This is confirmed in 4:15–16 which states: “**The LORD routed²⁹ Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot. But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not even one was left.**” The emphasis in these two verses is that “all” the military might and technology of the Canaanites is annihilated. How in the world did this happen? Chapter 5 tells us that at just the right moment, the Lord allowed the Kishon River to flood and completely disable the enemy so that Israel could slay them (5:4–5, 19–20).³⁰ Sisera’s legendary iron chariots become mired in the muck and mud. Hence, all of Sisera’s tactical advantages go down the drain as Barak’s infantry charges down from Mount Tabor and absolutely destroys the Canaanites.³¹

The battle plan God had given Barak made little sense, militarily speaking. Chariots were very effective on the plains, but they were of little or no value in the mountains. God ordered Barak to muster his troops on Mount Tabor, and then to lead them down from the mountain and onto the plains. This is precisely where the chariots had the advantage and could do the most damage. Humanly speaking, the plan didn’t make sense. But in retrospect we can see how shrewd God’s plan was. Because the Israelite army was on the plain, Sisera felt that his chariots were the perfect weapon. He ordered all of his chariots to engage the Israelites in battle. It looked like a slaughter, which is exactly the way God wanted it to appear. The Canaanites depended upon their nine hundred chariots. The Israelites chose to trust in God’s promise. What are you depending upon to give you spiritual victory? Throughout the Book of Judges, God uses weak and foolish people and methods. He continues to do so today. Will you offer yourself to the Lord? *God intervenes when we act with courageous faith.*

It is interesting to read the Book of Hebrews with this story in mind, because when you come to the great roll call of heroes in Hebrews 11, there are a number of judges whose names are cited as examples of faith. There is Gideon and Jephthah and Samson, and there is Barak. What is notable is that there is no mention made of Deborah. And if it were not for this story we would never know of Deborah’s place in history. She was content to take that role. Deborah could have called herself, “judge,” “prophetess,” “general,” “leader,” “woman of God par excellence,” or “wife of Lappidoth.” However, she describes herself as “a mother in Israel” (5:7). Her position is one of mother, not only to her own biological children but mother to all the children of Israel. Perhaps you’re not in an influential position of authority. You can still be a mother to your children and the children in your neighborhood and lead them in the right direction. Perhaps you have little power in your job or position, you can still be a mother to those around you and inspire them to righteousness. Perhaps your life allows little time or opportunity for significant positions of leadership, you can still be a mother in your sphere, whether big or small, wielding influence far beyond your lowly position. You can be like Deborah, used of God to be a mother in Israel.³² Don’t let our society talk you down, take a step of courageous faith and watch God intervene in your life.

Act 2: Jael’s victory (4:17–24). In the following story, Barak’s fearfulness is contrasted with Jael’s faithfulness.³³ But first, our “to be continued...” story picks up from 4:11. “**Now 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.**” Heber has indeed changed sides. He is no longer on Israel’s side, but on the Canaanites’ side. He has made an alliance with the enemy. So Barak seeks out his wife’s tent. This is forbidden in the Ancient Near East culture.³⁴ But what Sisera doesn’t know is: In spite of her husband’s loyalty to Sisera, Jael is loyal to Israel.

In 4:18, **“Jael [“mountain goat”] went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, ‘Turn aside, my master, turn aside to me! Do not be afraid.’ And he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. He said to her, ‘Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.’ So she opened a bottle of milk and gave him a drink; then she covered him.”** Providentially, Heber is not home but Jael offers Sisera hospitality. She invites him into her tent and tells him not to fear. Like Deborah, the mother of Israel, Jael treats Sisera like a little boy. She covers him with a rug, gives him milk to drink, and tucks him into bed because he has had a long, hard day.

Before he drifts off to sleep, Sisera says to Jael, **“Stand in the doorway of the tent, and it shall be if anyone comes and inquires of you, and says, ‘Is there anyone here?’ that you shall say, ‘No.’ But Jael, Heber’s wife, took a tent peg and seized a hammer in her hand, and went secretly to him and drove the peg into his temple,³⁵ and it went through into the ground; for he was sound asleep and exhausted. So he died.³⁶ And behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him and said to him, ‘Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.’ And he entered with her, and behold Sisera was lying dead with the tent peg in his temple.”³⁷** This lady is a bad mama-jama. She is a courageous warrior! This is the origin of the expression, “Step softly but carry a big hammer.” By the standards of ancient warfare, she is a hero. She decisively and courageously helped God’s people at a critical moment in history.³⁸

It is tempting to wonder, “What if Jael missed in her death blow?” Sisera would have awoken and killed her on the spot. But we must remember that in biblical times, pitching a tent and striking camp was a woman’s work. Jael had the tools of her trade close at hand and knew how to use them. Driving a tent peg through Sisera’s skull was like a hot knife through butter. From an Israelite point of view, Jael did a masterful piece of work. The glory did, indeed, go to a woman and not to Barak.

Verses 23 and 24 conclude this account and mark a turning point for Israel. **“So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the sons of Israel. The hand of the sons of Israel pressed heavier and heavier upon Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin the king of Canaan.”** The defeat of Sisera and his army was a turning point in history because it put the Israelites on the offensive and the Canaanites on the defensive. This victory not only eliminated some of Jabin’s top warriors, but it deprived him of his greatest weapons—his nine hundred iron-rimmed chariots. The spoils of this victory would also have provided armor and weapons for many Israelite soldiers—men who previously would have had to fight unarmed (see Judges 5:8). This placed a great handicap on the Canaanites, and leveled the playing field for future battles. God brought all this to pass through the obedience of two women.³⁹ *God intervenes when we act with courageous faith.*

The Finale: Deborah’s victory song (5:1–31). Our passage concludes in chapter 5 with Deborah’s song of praise. Whenever God’s people win a battle, they break out into praise. Call it the Hebrew way! In 5:2, Deborah exclaims, “Bless the LORD”; again in 5:9 she says, “Bless the LORD”; and in 5:11 she declares, “There they shall recount the righteous deeds of the LORD.” The entire focus of this chapter is on God’s glorious power. What is also of great interest is this song emphasizes who did and who did not participate in the battle against Sisera. Deborah begins with commendation. In 5:2, God’s people step up—the leaders lead and the people volunteer. This verse explains the theme of the chapter. In 5:13–15a, five specific tribes are commended for fighting Sisera’s army: Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir (part of the tribe of Manasseh), Zebulun, and Issachar. After commending these five tribes, in 5:15b–17, Deborah turns to four specific tribes who refused to join the fight: Reuben, Gilead, Dan, and Asher. The people of Gilead thought they need not join in the conflict since they live on the other side of the Jordan River. The people of Dan were too busy doing business with the nations and their ships. The people of Asher were unwilling to leave their homes by the Mediterranean Sea. Deborah then returns to commendation and focuses in on two peoples who were very different. In 5:18 we read, **“Zebulun was a people who despised their lives even to death, and Naphtali also, on the high places of the field.”**

This section reminds us that we must make a choice whether or not we will serve the Lord (Josh 24:15). It is so easy to be passive, lazy, busy, and distracted, yet the honor goes to those churches and individuals who are faithful to the Lord. Although the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church universal (Matt 16:18), thousands of American churches will close their doors every year. There is no guarantee that any church will remain successful. This is also true of individuals. If you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior, you are good for heaven, but you may not be good for earth. Deborah's song could have been a song in Barak's honor, but instead God's choice women received the glory. Barak was not fully obedient to what God called him to do. Today, will your story be different?

The last verse of this section is particularly meaningful. The author of Judges writes, **“Thus let all Your enemies perish, O LORD; But let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun in its might.’ And the land was undisturbed for forty years.”** I will tell you a little secret. I always keep the shades in my office closed. A colleague in my former church occasionally called me Count Dracula because, like a vampire, I lived in darkness. The reason I do this is because if the shades are open, I will be distracted with the sites of people pulling into our church parking lot, going into our church auditorium, or coming into our office. I need to focus on my appointments and sermon preparation. However, I can't resist a gorgeous sunrise. Last week as our staff met in my office, I saw the sunrise peeking through my blinds. It was so beautiful that I had to open them. As I observed the sunrise, I couldn't help but glorify God for His beauty. Whenever I see a sunrise, I feel especially close to God. Sunrises remind me of His great love for me and also of the great love that I need to have for the S-O-N. As I love the Lord Jesus Christ, I become like the rising of the sun in its might. *God intervenes when we act with courageous faith.*

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Scripture References

Judges 4–5

Matthew 12:43–45

Exodus 14–15

Deuteronomy 32

2 Samuel 1:17–27

Psalm 18

Luke 1

Study Questions

1. Following eighty years of peace and Ehud's death, Israel returns to her wayward ways (4:1). Why does this repeatedly happen throughout Judges? What can I do as a leader to ensure that my legacy makes a lasting difference? Who can I transfer truth to so that the next generation will grow in godliness? What will I do this week to impact the next generation?
2. As a man, how am I like Barak (4:8)? When I am filled with doubt and fear, how do I usually respond? What should I do? Read 2 Timothy 1:7 and James 1:6–8. How can I be a mighty man of faith? Read Mark 11:22–24. Who inspires me to cultivate greater faith? How can I spend more time with this person? Read Proverbs 27:17. What can I do to ensure that the times I spend with this individual are spiritually worthwhile?
3. As a woman, how am I like Deborah (4:4–10)? How have the men in my life failed me so that I have had to step up in my marriage, family, work, and ministry? Will I commit today to pray that God will raise up stronger men in my life and church? Will I simultaneously do what God has called me to do in a submissive, teachable, and gracious way?
4. God fulfilled His Word and gave Deborah, Barak, and Jael victory over the Canaanites (4:10–22). What has God called me to do? What promises has He given me? Why do I still lack faith and persist in disobedience? What can I do today to step out in faith and obedience? What is holding me back? Read Mark 4:35–41 and ask God to increase your faith. Meditate on Hebrews 11 and ask God to make you a person of faith.
5. One step of obedience often leads to many blessings (4:23–24). How have I experienced this biblical principle in my own Christian life? In what ways does my history with God's grace and faithfulness encourage me? What area of my life is God asking me to surrender to Him today? Read Luke 14:25–35. Will I fall back on His goodness and mercy? Do I truly believe that He will sustain me?

Notes

¹ This is the chapter title of Judges 4 from Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges: Such a Great Salvation*. Focus on the Bible (Ross-Shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2000), 69.

² Gary Inrig, *Heart of Iron, Feet of Clay* (Chicago: Moody, 1979), 55.

³ Block writes, "No literary unit in Judges has evoked more scholarly discussion than these two chapters." Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*. The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 177.

⁴ This is the exact same wording as the Ehud narrative (Judges 3:12).

⁵ Interestingly, Judges 5:8 does reveal that Israel began to worship "new gods!" Yet, they are still worshipping dead idols.

⁶ Davis, *Judges*, 72.

⁷ As you read this narrative, however, you get the impression that Sisera, captain of Jabin's army, is the real power in the land. Jabin isn't even mentioned in Deborah's song in Judges 5.

⁸ Critics of the Scripture have been quick to point out Joshua also fought a king of Hazor named Jabin and suggests this may be an evidence of the unreliability of Scripture. Actually, archaeological research at Hazor has demonstrated the amazing accuracy of the Scripture on this point. Jabin was not a personal name, but rather a dynastic title which belonged to the king of that city. Also, Jabin appears to be only a figurehead leader in this opposition of Israel. The real power of this alliance was that of Sisera. Archaeologists have discovered that though Hazor was rebuilt after Joshua, the city had not returned to its former strength by this time.

⁹ Judges 5:6–8 expounds further on the domination of the Canaanites. The Canaanite presence in Israel wrought great havoc. The highways were virtually deserted, no doubt heavily patrolled by the Canaanites with their chariots. Villages were likewise abandoned because there were no walls to protect the people from being pillaged and robbed by the Canaanites. The Israelites seem to have retreated to the walled cities, and even these did not really protect them. And if the Canaanites had their chariots, swords, spears, and shields, it would seem that the Israelites were not allowed to possess any weapons. Israel may have been able to muster 40,000 warriors, but they would have had to fight unarmed.

¹⁰ Contrary to what people think, ancient iron chariots were not like mod tanks. They were not used to break through enemy lines. Instead they were used for pursuit and slaughter of the fleeing enemy. They were primarily a killing platform. Against a fleeing enemy in an open plain they were very effective. K. Lawson Younger Jr., *Judges, Ruth*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 139.

¹¹ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 193–94 gives twelve arguments against Deborah being understood as a judge in the delivering sense of the word.

¹² This appears to be the same kind of "judging" we see Moses doing (Exod 18:13–27), and later his seventy helpers (Num 11:16–30).

¹³ Deborah was both a judge and a prophetess. Moses' sister Miriam was a prophetess (Exod 15:20); and later biblical history introduces us to Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14), Noadiah (Neh 6:14), Anna (Luke 2:26), and the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9). Other prominent women in the Bible include Queen Esther (Esther 2:15–9:32), Priscilla (Acts 18:18–26), and Phoebe (Rom 16:1).

¹⁴ Deborah's name also suggests her prophetic role as she spoke to Barak since the consonants in her name are the same as those in the Hebrew word translated "speak" and "word." The writer may have referred to her palm tree, another source of sweetness, to contrast it with the oak of Zaananim under which the compromising Heber worked (4:11). Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Judges" (2009 ed.):

<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/judges.pdf>, 29–30.

¹⁵ J. Clinton McCann, *Judges*. Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox, 2002), 51–52.

¹⁶ Lit. "Has not Yahweh, the God of Israel, commanded you, go...?"

¹⁷ The NET Bible renders the first part of this verse as a question, as does the KJV and the NKJV, and some others.

¹⁸ It may be that Barak feared no one would follow him. Such fears were not unfounded. After all, the Israelites had been oppressed for 20 years by the Canaanites. The Canaanites were well armed; the Israelites were virtually unarmed. Many had been coming to Deborah for judgment. Perhaps they would follow her into battle, even if they would not follow Barak. Eaton disagrees and sees Barak as acting within his assurance of faith. Michael Eaton, *Judges and Ruth*. Preaching through the Bible (England: Sovereign World, 2000), 26.

¹⁹ Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 199.

²⁰ The Greek OT adds: "for I [Barak] never know what day the angel of the Lord will give me success."

²¹ This would not have been such a terrible request. After all, did the Israelites not take the means of discerning God's will into battle with them at other times (1 Sam 14:3, 18–20; 30:7–8)? Even Jonathan sought a sign to confirm that his attack was God's will (1 Sam 14:6–14).

²² Bob Deffinbaugh, "The Prophetess Deborah (Judges 4 & 5)": http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=2402.

²³ Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 143.

²⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Available: Judges*, Electronic ed.

²⁵ The phrase "into the hand of a woman" is in emphatic position in the Hebrew text.

²⁶ See also Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 600.

²⁷ The story of Israel's deliverance under Deborah and Barak is told twice, once as a narrative and once as a poetic song. These two tellings complement each other and provide a unique look at the way Israel remembered its past. Paul Wright ed., *Joshua, Judges*. Shepherd's Notes (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 67.

²⁸ Ann Spangler & Jean E. Syswerda, *Women of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 109.

²⁹ The Hebrew verb *hamam* sometimes describe situations in which God brings a thunderstorm (Josh 10:10–11; 1 Sam 7:10; Pss 18:14; 144:6). See John Stek, "A Bee and a Mountain Goat: A Literary Reading of Judges 4," in *A Tribute to Gleason Archer*, ed. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., and Ronald F. Youngblood (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 68.

³⁰ The Canaanite god Baal was the god of storms, so the sudden change of weather would have affected the superstitious Canaanites. Had their own god Baal turned against them? Was the God of Israel stronger than Baal? If so, then the battle was already lost, and the wisest thing the soldiers could do was flee.

³¹ Davis, *Judges*, 75.

³² Spangler & Syswerda, *Women of the Bible*, 110.

³³ Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 600.

³⁴ Matthews lays out seven violations of hospitality in the Jael narrative. Victor H. Matthews, *Judges and Ruth*. New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 68–69.

³⁵ The war is not over until the military commander is captured and killed.

³⁶ How can Jael be commended for such a cruel act of murder? First, it should be remembered that Sisera was a mighty warrior. When he came to Jael's tent, Jael was hardly in a position to refuse him entrance. Although it was Jael who went out to meet Sisera to encourage him to find refuge in her tent, it is clear from 4:17 that he was already planning to go to Jael's tent. Second, Sisera was a cruel warrior who had viciously oppressed God's people. If Sisera had escaped from the battle, he would most certainly have lived to brutalize God's people again. If Jael had not acted, she would have been party to any future slaughter or oppression of God's people by this godless man. Third, Jael's own commitment to the Lord God of Israel dictated the only course of action she could take. The enemies of the Lord and the Lord's people were Jael's enemies. She had to kill him. She could not hope to face such a warrior in combat. Her action had to be swift and certain. She could not take a chance on failing to kill him and perhaps merely wound him. She had to take decisive action that would result in the certain and sudden death of Sisera. Faced with the alternatives, Jael chose the greater good. To prevent the future slaughter and oppression of the people of God, Jael killed Sisera. Fourth, although there is no place in the Bible where God honors or praises Jael for the manner in which she killed Sisera, the song of Deborah certainly praises her for her decisive action. Jael was an instrument in the hands of God to bring judgment upon this terrible enemy of God's people. See Norman L. Geisler and Thomas A. Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1992), 147.

³⁷ Was Sisera lying down when Jael killed him, or was he upright as Judges 5:27 seems to indicate? The poetic description of Judges 5:27 can be understood to describe possible convulsions which Sisera's body exhibited after the blow to the head. Also, the term "fell" is frequently used in a figurative sense to indicate someone's demise. This would be especially likely in the poetic structure of chapter 5. The poem is not describing a literal falling down to the ground, as if Sisera was upright. Rather, it is poetically picturing Sisera's demise. At the hand of this maiden, the mighty Sisera, captain of the army of the Canaanite king, has fallen. There is no contradiction here, merely the difference between historical narrative accurately reporting the events in a literal manner, and poetic expression accurately reporting the events in a poetic figure. See Geisler and Howe, *When Critics Ask*, 147.

³⁸ From Sisera's arrival and subsequent actions Jael must have realized that the Israelites were prevailing in the battle with the Canaanites. She must have sensed this was her opportunity to come to Israel's aid by putting Sisera to death.

³⁹ Sailhamer writes, "The author's point in all this is not to elevate the virtues of women over those of men. Throughout the narrative he wants it abundantly clear that it was God and God alone who delivered Israel's enemies into their hands (4:9, 14, 23; 5:31), working mightily through the resourcefulness of these two courageous women." John Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 208.