

It has been many years since the death of Joshua and Israel has once again strayed and “did evil in the sight of the LORD” (v. 1). As a result, they have suffered oppression from the Canaanite king Jabin and the captain of his army, Sisera, for 20 years. The LORD responds when Israel cried out to Him for help by raising up Deborah, a prophetess, who declares the word of the LORD to guide them back to the LORD and into freedom from their oppressors.

Throughout the book of Judges, Israel alternates between periods of prosperity and oppression. For a while they would follow the LORD and enjoy the rest from their enemies that He would provide. Eventually they would stray into idolatry and sin and as a result the LORD would allow Israel’s enemies to oppress them until Israel cried to the LORD for help. The LORD would then raise up a judge who would deliver them from their enemies and lead them back to the LORD. Israel would then follow the LORD for a while before eventually straying and the next cycle alternating between prosperity and oppression would begin again.

**Verses 1-3:** Israel has entered another cycle of being oppressed by their enemies because they have been doing “evil in the sight of the LORD” by straying once again into idolatry. This time the oppressor is Jabin, the king of Canaan, and Sisera, the captain of Jabin’s army, has been severely harassing Israel for 20 years. The events in this chapter occur at the end of this 20 year period of oppression.

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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.

**“And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time”** – We are introduced to a female prophet named Deborah. She is described as the “wife of Lapidoth,” although commentators admit that Lapidoth may be a location rather than a man’s name. The Hebrew word translated here as “wife” is a generic word for “woman” or “female” thus “wife” is an interpretation based on the context. We are told that Deborah was serving as judge in Israel at the time. Being a prophetess, Deborah was guided by the wisdom of God and so people came to Deborah in order to hear from the LORD.

**“And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Beth-el in mount Ephraim”** – This palm tree near her home was apparently the spot where she sat and received those who came to inquire of the LORD.

**“and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment [justice; to decide a case]”** – The children of Israel came to Deborah to settle the differences between them. They trusted that, as a prophetess, Deborah would decide their case according to the will of the LORD.

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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?

**“And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedesh-naphtali”** – Deborah was not a military leader, and so the LORD instructs her to summon a specific man, Barak, to lead a military assault against the Canaanite army of Sisera. Barak is listed among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11:32.

**“and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel commanded...?”** – The command is stated in the form of a question, which is a Hebrew form sometimes used rhetorically to emphasize the importance or truthfulness of a statement.

**“saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun”** – Barak is to bring to Mt. Tabor an army of 10,000 men assembled from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun. Mt. Tabor was at the border between those two tribes. It is also near the border of the tribe of Issachar but it appears that the LORD does not call for their participation in this battle.

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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.

**“And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude”** – The LORD will sovereignly cause Sisera to decide to march his army to Kishon, a river that ran along the western border of Zebulun. We see later that Sisera hears the report that Barak has an army at Mt. Tabor (v. 12) and responds by bringing all 900 of his iron chariots and his entire army to the Kishon river in order to prepare to fight against Barak’s army (v. 13).

**“and I will deliver him into thine hand”** – Sisera had the advantage with the 900 chariots and likely a larger army but the LORD promises that He will give Israel the victory. The LORD is in control of the entire situation because He has brought Sisera to Kishon and will give the victory to Barak.

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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.

Commentators disagree on whether Barak is exhibiting faith or doubt in this verse. Some say he has more faith in Deborah than he has in the LORD since he insists that she accompany him in going to Mt. Tabor. They say that instead of trusting that the LORD will be with him regardless of where Deborah is, he is depending on her relationship with the LORD rather than his own. They also point out that Deborah’s response to Barak seems like a reprimand. On the other hand, there are those that say that Barak’s faith is in the LORD since he insists that the LORD’s representative go with him. After all, they say, there must be a reason Barak is named among the heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11 (Heb. 11:32). Regardless of which view is true, Barak is willing to obey the word of the LORD by going into battle against a superior military force, believing that the LORD will give the victory that He promised.

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

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**“And she said, I will surely go with thee”** – There does not seem to be any hesitation on Deborah’s part, nor does Barak have to convince her to go with him on this mission. Obviously she has the permission of the LORD to go as well as faith that the LORD will give them the victory He has promised.

**“notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman”** – By requiring Deborah to go with him, Barak must relinquish the honor for killing Sisera. That honor will go to a woman, not by chance, but by the hand of the LORD. Notice that the LORD is still in control of events.

**“And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh”** – Barak was from Kedesh, a fortified city in the northern half of the territory of Naphtali. It is here that Barak and Deborah go to assemble an army from the men of the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun before they march to Mt. Tabor.

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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.

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**“And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh”** – Barak sends out the call for the men of Zebulun and Naphtali to come to Kedesh. The call for the men of Zebulun and Naphtali to assemble for battle may have went out through messengers. However, since Barak is operating under the guidance of Deborah, the call was likely made through the blowing of trumpets, which was the method commanded by the LORD through Moses: **Num. 10:9** *“And if ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppreseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets; and ye shall be remembered before the LORD your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies.”*

**“and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet”** – Barak leads the army of 10,000 men up to camp at Mt. Tabor. The phrase “at his feet” is an expression meaning that they were “on his heels” or, more figuratively speaking, that the men were following him closely. This implies that Barak lead from among his men and not from a safe distance, giving us a clue to his leadership abilities.

**“and Deborah went up with him”** – Deborah also accompanies him to Mt. Tabor as spiritual guidance. He would be able to consult the LORD through her as the need required, which may be the reason that he insisted that she come as well.

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**Verses 11-24:** Sisera gathers his army at the river of Kishon, as the LORD had said he would (v. 7). The LORD sent the command to Barak through Deborah that it was time to march against Sisera and thus the battle began. The LORD caused the battle to go against Sisera and his army to the extent that Sisera abandons his chariot and flees on foot in desperation. With the army of Israel in pursuit, Sisera comes across the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber. She invites him to take refuge in her tent, giving him milk to drink and covering him with a blanket. He asks her to hide the fact that he is there and soon falls asleep in his weariness. Once he was sound asleep, Jael takes a hammer and drives a tent stake through his temples into the ground, killing him. When Barak passes by the tent in pursuit of Sisera, Jael goes out to meet him and brings him back to show him that Sisera was dead. This victory is how God rescued Israel from the oppression of Jabin, the king of Canaan and the land had rest for 40 years (Judges 5:31).