

DEBORAH AND BARAK—PART 1

Judges 4

MAIN CHARACTERS

- Deborah, a prophetess; Barak, an Israelite general; Jabin, King of Canaanite Hazor; Sisera, foreign general commanding Jabin's army; Heber, a metalworker allied with Jabin; Jael, wife of Heber, who kills Sisera

LITERARY FEATURES AND GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING

- a piece of literary art: brief story with few details, fast paced, vocabulary pairing, and inverted parallelism (ABCDC'B'A')—

Sons of Israel Oppressed (4:1–3)

- Deborah the Prophetess (4:4–9)
- Barak and Sisera "Call Out (*za'aq*)" Their Armies (4:10–12/13)
- Jehovah the Warrior (4:14a)
- Barak and Sisera "Go Down (*yarad*)" to Fight (4:14b/15–16)
- Jael, the Wife of Heber (4:17–22)
- Jabin, King of Canaan, Subdued (4:23–24)

- location and battlefield: the main action takes place in the north—in the Plain of Esdraelon and near the Sea of Galilee
 - Hazor, Jabin's capital, is 10 miles NW of the Sea of Galilee; Mount Tabor is 10 miles SW of the Sea of Galilee

SONS OF ISRAEL OPPRESSED (A 4:1–3)

- *verse 1*: (1) apostasy soon followed Ehud's death, (2) the people return to idolatry and Baal worship (cf. Judg 2:11–15; 3:7), (3) the third oppression begins (ca. 1215 B.C.), and (4) an important spiritual principle—forced worship is never lasting
- *verse 2*: (1) the LORD sold his people into slavery to a new master because they refused to serve Him (cf. Judg 10:6–7), (2) Jabin and his general Sisera recovered the territory once ruled by the kings of Hazor, (3) Sisera is not a Canaanite name: perhaps he was a soldier of fortune, (4) Hazor was conquered by Joshua and possibly still lay in ruins (Josh 11:10), (5) Jabin is probably a royal name (like Pharaoh) and not a personal name (cf. a former Jabin slain by Joshua, Josh 11:1, 10)
- *verse 3*: (1) the third oppression mostly affected the northern tribes of Zebulun, Naphtali, West Manasseh, Issachar, and Asher, (2) lasted 20 years, from 1215–1195 B.C., (3) most likely 900 chariots were the combined force of several allied Canaanite cities

DEBORAH THE PROPHETESS (B 4:4–9)

- (1) her name means "bee" (cf. Deut 1:44); (2) she is never called a warrior or deliverer—just a prophetess; (3) her character is blameless—unlike other judges; (4) she was serving Jehovah before her battle with the Canaanites (she "was judging Israel" 4:4–5): "judging" is not judicial, but prophetic (people came to her to cry out to God for help and to hear her "judgment")
 - apparently they went to her because the priesthood was apostate and no longer received answers or judgments from God
- this is a protested call narrative, as is the story of Gideon (Judg 6; cf. Luke 1:26–38): Introduction (4:4–5), Confrontation (4:6a); Commission (4:6b–7), Protest (4:8), Reassurance (4:9), and Conclusion—Barak defeats Sisera (4:10–24)
- conditional obedience brings loss of reward (honor) but not loss of service—Barak does not kill Sisera (Judg 4:9; cf. 4:21–22)
 - *verse 6*: (1) Barak means "Thunderbolt," (2) Kedesh in Naphtali was affected by the Canaanite oppression, (3) six tribes participated in the battle, (4) Mount Tabor is about 1300 feet high and NE of the battleground
- *verse 7*: (1) Barak camped on the slopes of Mount Tabor, safe from chariot attack, (2) Sisera chose the Valley of Jezreel along the Kishon River to give his chariots ample maneuvering space, (3) the LORD plans to draw Sisera and his army into a trap, (4) Deborah clearly indicates the source of deliverance—the LORD