

# DEBORAH AND BARAK—PART 2

## Judges 4

### BARAK AND SISERA "CALL OUT (ZA'AQ)" THEIR ARMIES (C 4:10–12/13)

- Kenites were a clan of metalworkers allied with Israel since the days of Moses
- apparently Heber moved from the south near Arad to the north to help make Jabin's iron chariots (cf. 4:17)
  - no doubt Heber informed Jabin of Barak's military preparations (4:12)

### YAHWEH THE WARRIOR (D 4:14a)

- this is the literary center and turning point of the story—the most important verse in the chapter
- she pictures the LORD as a King leading his army to victory and again gives credit for the victory to the LORD (cf. 4:15, 23)

### BARAK AND SISERA "GO DOWN (YARAD)" TO FIGHT (C' 4:14b/15–16)

- Deborah ordered Barak to attack from Mount Tabor (4:14)
- "the LORD confused Sisera" (4:15) refers to a thunderstorm that swelled the Kishon River and flooded Wadi Kishon (5:20–21)
  - as a result Sisera's horses and chariots became mired in the mud or were swept away in a raging torrent
    - Sisera's tactical advantage went down the drain and the muck kept his army from escaping
      - Sisera fled on foot through the hills of Lower Galilee toward the Jordan River
- Barak (Thunderbolt) began his attack *before* the thunderstorm—a great act of faith that put him in the Hall of Fame (Heb 11:32)
  - the flooded Kishon River helped Napoleon defeat a Turkish army in April of 1799
  - a quarter of an hour's rain on the clay soil of Esdraelon delayed all cavalry maneuvers in World War I

### JAEI, THE WIFE OF HEBER (B' 4:17–22)

- Jael means "wild goat" or "mountain goat"
- she offered Sisera an ideal hiding place: in the ancient Near East only a woman's husband or father could enter her tent
  - Sisera probably would not have entered her tent without her invitation
- ancient Near Eastern laws of hospitality demanded protecting a "guest" (a custom still practiced in Arabic countries today)
  - Sisera trusted Jael because her family was bound by treaty with Jabin (4:17)

### JABIN, KING OF CANAAN, SUBDUED (A' 4:23–24)

- with Sisera dead the kingdom of Jabin was no longer a threat

### MORAL PROBLEM

- Jael has been unjustly vilified by many commentators: (1) "What happened then was as much an outrage against the ethics of her own time as against ours today. The terrible deed done, Jael stood guilty of violating the laws of hospitality, of falsehood, treachery, and murder (*New Bible Dictionary*, 596). (2) "Even regarded solely as a triumph in a righteous war, it seems strange that such an unnatural act should prove the subject of holy rejoicing" (*New Bible Dictionary*, 596).

### TREACHERY OR HEROISM?

- things to consider: (1) the nation was at war, (2) as a woman Jael could not meet Sisera in combat, so she resorted to cunning
  - she knew how to use a tent peg: pitching tents and striking camp is women's work among modern bedouin
- was Jael guilty of the sins of lying, treachery, and murder? apparently not, since Deborah commends Jael (5:24–27)

### CONCLUSION

- assassination of foreign leaders is a legitimate weapon of war in the Old Testament (cf. Ehud in Judges 3:12–30)
  - killing in war is not murder and deception in war is one of the rules of the game