

The warfare of the Lord

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[0 : 00] Well, friends, let's turn to listen now to the word of the Lord, the book of Judges, chapter 4, and you'll find this on page 203, page 203.

Last week, we heard the stories of the first three of the named judges who appear here in the book of Judges, Othniel, Ehud, who killed King Eglon, and then briefly we read of Shamgar at the end of chapter 3.

And now here in chapter 4, we have the story of Deborah and Barak. There is a song that they wrote and sang, which is in chapter 5, but we'll leave that for the next time.

So Judges, chapter 4, Deborah and Barak. And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord after Ehud died.

And the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin, king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth Hagoyim.

[1 : 03] Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord for help, for Sisera had 900 chariots of iron, and he oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for 20 years.

Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim.

And the people of Israel came up to her for judgment. She sent and summoned Barak, the son of Abinoam, from Kedesh Naphtali, and said to him, Has not the Lord, the God of Israel, commanded you?

Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun. And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the river 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.

[2 : 15] 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 arose and went with Barak to Kedesh.

And Barak called out Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh, and 10,000 men went up at his heels, and Deborah went up with him. Now Heber, the Kenite, had separated from the Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zarnanim, which is near Kedesh.

When Sisera was told that Barak, the son of Abinoam, had gone up to Mount Tabor, Sisera called out all his chariots, 900 chariots of iron, and all the men who were with him from Harosheth-Hagoim to the river Kishon.

And Deborah said to Barak, Up! For this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the Lord go out before you?

So Barak went down from Mount Tabor, with 10,000 men following him. And the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword.

[3 : 34] And Sisera got down from his chariot and fled away on foot. And Barak pursued the chariots and the army to Harosheth-Hagoim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword.

Not a man was left. But 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.

And Jael came out to meet Sisera, and said to him, Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me, do not be afraid. So he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug.

And he said to her, Please give me a little water to drink, for I'm thirsty. So she opened a skin of milk, and gave him a drink, and covered him. And he said to her, Stand at the opening of the tent,

and if any man comes and asks you, Is anyone here? Say no.

But Jael, the wife of Heber, took a tent peg, and took a hammer in her hand. Then she went softly to him, and drove the peg into his temple, until it went down into the ground, while he was lying fast asleep from weariness.

[4 : 54] So he died. And behold, as Barak was pursuing 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 lay Sisera dead, with the tent peg in his temple. So on that day, God subdued Jabin, the king of Canaan, before the people of Israel.

And the hand of the people of Israel pressed harder and harder against Jabin, the king of Canaan, until they destroyed Jabin, king of Canaan.

This is the word of the Lord, and may it be a blessing to us. Well, friends, let's open up again at Judges chapter 4, page 203.

My title for the sermon tonight is The Warfare of the Lord. The Warfare of the Lord. And this is another gripping story, every bit as gripping, every bit as gruesome, you might say, as the story of Ehud and King Eglon, which we were reading last week.

[6 : 07] Before we get into the actual story and the details here in chapter 4, I'd like us to look back to the first few verses of chapter 3, because they shed a lot of light on the scenes of battle and conflict, which we find running right through the book of Judges, and not least here in chapter 4.

So let me read just the first two verses of chapter 3. Now, these are the nations that the Lord left to test Israel by them. That is, all in Israel who had not experienced all the wars in Canaan.

It was only in order that the generations of the people of Israel might know war, to teach war to those who had not known it before. Before.

Now, isn't that interesting? When the Israelites crossed the River Jordan and began to colonize the land of Canaan, you remember the Lord commanded them to drive out the various Canaanite Gentile nations, and they succeeded in driving some of them out.

But they didn't do a thorough job of it. And we now read in these opening verses of chapter 3 why the Lord left these little pockets of Gentile population. It was to test the people of Israel, to try them out, to train them, and to harden them, so that they should know war, to use that phrase from verse 2, so that they should experience war.

[7 : 32] Now, our first reaction might be to bridle somewhat at that idea. We might want to say, but isn't this rather shocking, almost scandalous, that the Lord God should want to train his people to be fighters?

Is this really the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, that we're reading about? The Lord Jesus who said, Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God. Well, yes, this is the father of the Prince of Peace. But there's a most important element of Bible understanding here, which we need to get into our systems, if we're really going to understand the Gospel.

And that is that Jesus, in order to establish peace between God and man, had to come as a warrior. And he had to do battle with Satan and defeat Satan at the cross.

So the price of our peaceful relations with God is the warfare of the Son of God. His wounds, his battling, and his dying were essential if the hostility between God and man was to be brought to an end.

[8 : 37] Now, that is, you might say, the big picture or the cosmic eternal picture. Christ has won the decisive battle with the enemy, defeating Satan at his cross and resurrection.

And it's the cross and resurrection of Jesus that assures us of our final salvation and entry into the peace and the bliss of the new creation. But, while we are still here in this old world, our experience of life mirrors that of the Lord Jesus.

And to follow in his footsteps means following in his example of warfare. The warfare and the battle and the suffering is an essential part of the real Christian life.

And if you and I are not willing to be trained in warfare, and indeed to practice warfare, we're never going to grow up as Christians. Now, our warfare is different from that of Barak and Ehud.

Their weapons were swords and spears. And ours certainly are not. Our weapon is the gospel. But the gospel is a weapon. It defeats and subdues the lies of the devil.

[9 : 44] It liberates people from bondage to sin. But warfare is our calling. And the big lesson of Judges chapter 4 is a lesson about the Lord's warfare and the part that his people play in it.

And as we read this passage this evening, we must allow it to give us some further training in Christ's military academy. Do you remember how Paul wrote to Timothy? Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

So the church is an army. And Judges chapter 4 is a chapter in the training manual of Christ's army. Well, let's turn to the story.

And I think I've got four main headings tonight. Let's notice first the terrifying power of the enemy. Look at the first little paragraph in chapter 4.

Now at this point, would that be okay?

[11:05] Thanks very much. The audiovisual department are going to help me here. And there is our map of... Ah, great. Terrific. Thank you very much. Now the action of Judges...

Let me just point out one or two features. Jerusalem you'll see there. And that large piece of water near it is the Dead Sea. You follow the River Jordan northwards and you get to the Sea of Galilee. And there's another little, very small lake a little bit further up there.

But the action of Judges chapter 4, and you'll see where I've put cross swords for the battle, happens near Mount Table in the northern part of Israel and quite near to the Sea of Galilee.

So that was the headquarters of Jabin, the Canaanite king, up at Hazor, a little bit further north.

Now, there are some interesting details in these first three verses.

Let's keep it up there for a bit because I'll notice one or two other geographical features as we go along. But let's notice some interesting details. Verse 1 makes the point that it was after Ehud had died that the people of Israel once again did evil in the sight of the Lord.

[12:12] And if you ask, what was that? What did that mean? Just glance back to chapter 2, verse 11. Chapter 2, verse 11. And you'll see what that evil was. The evil was serving the Baals and abandoning the Lord.

So this phrase, doing what was evil in the sight of the Lord, becomes shorthand for the spiritual adultery that deserts the Lord God and serves the local fertility gods.

But it was after Ehud had died that the old problem, the old addiction, sprang up again. And if you look at chapter 2, verse 19, you'll see how this very pattern is set out.

2, 19. Whenever the judge died, whenever the particular judge who'd just been in operation died, the people turned back and were more corrupt than their fathers going after other gods, serving them and bowing down to them.

They did not drop any of their practices or their stubborn ways. So Ehud's godly influence restrained them for a while.

[13:15] But take away the restraint and Israel shows her true character again. It's a reminder that the human heart needs more than a veneer of religion if it is to be freed from its addiction to idolatry.

If our hearts are not regenerated by the power of God, we will always turn back to the stale old idolatries of the world around us. Now, do you remember the cycle of despair that we saw last week, that pattern that gets repeated again and again in the book of Judges?

Well, we find it here again in chapter 4. We won't work through every section of it, but notice first the apostasy, the abandoning of the Lord at the beginning, followed by the punishment or chastisement in the form of the Lord causing an oppressor to get a grip on the people of Israel.

And this time, it is Jabin, the king of Canaan. Canaan. Now, the three oppressors that we met in chapter 3 all came from further afield.

There was Cush and Rishathane in chapter 3, verse 8, who came from Mesopotamia, which is way off the map, up to the northeast there. Then there was Eglon, king of Moab, and Moab was in Gentile territory to the eastern side of the Dead Sea.

[14:30] And then chapter 3, verse 31, Shamgar saved Israel from the Philistines, and they lived right down in the southwest corner here towards Egypt in the coastal area. But this new adversary is right there in the heart of Israel.

And of course, he should never have been there in the first place if the Israelites had been thoroughly obedient to the Lord and they'd driven the Canaanites right out of their territory. But they didn't. And this was the consequence of their half-hearted behavior to find themselves under the heel of this tyrant.

Now, Jabin himself keeps a very low profile, unlike Eglon in chapter 3, whose profile was high and you might say extensive as well. But Jabin, he never steps onto the stage at all.

Instead, we meet his chief representative, Sisera, who is the commander of his army, whose home, as verse 2 tells us, was in Harasheth, Hagoyim.

The very name place suggests hostility towards the Jews because Hagoyim, I didn't put the Hagoyim there because there wasn't quite room, but you can see where Harasheth is. But Hagoyim means of the Gentiles.

[15:39] Harasheth in Gentile territory, that's the idea. But the most gruesome feature of Sisera was not the name of his hometown, but his military equipment, 900 chariots of iron.

Now, at this period in history, around the 12th and 13th centuries BC, the Bronze Age was coming to an end and the Iron Age was beginning and arms factories were discovering the superior properties of iron.

An iron chariot in around 1200 BC was rather like the smart bombs and the drones of today. It was the very latest in military technology. And the Israelites would have been terrified because the Canaanites were further ahead than the Israelites in culture and all sorts of ways.

The Israelites, if they'd climbed up the hill and looked down into the valley, into Harasheth Hagoyim, and they'd seen these 900 gleaming chariots standing there in the sunshine as their attendants polished them and oiled them and kept them in a battle-ready state of preparation.

They'd have been filled with fear. And notice another nasty detail there in verse 3, and that is that Sisera oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for 20 years.

[16:55] There's no mention of cruelty in the accounts of Cush and Rishatham or Eglon back in chapter 3, but that word cruelly tells its own story and is intended to make the reader shudder.

So in verses 1, 2, and 3, although the details are really scanty, they tell us enough to reveal the abject and horrible situation that the Israelites were in because of their disobedience.

Abandoning the Lord led to bondage and misery in the 12th century B.C., as it still does in the 21st century A.D. So the terrifying power of the enemy.

But, although it was God who sold the people of Israel into the hand of the king of Canaan as a punishment, it was God who came to their rescue when they cried out in pain and anguish as they do in verse 3.

And beginning at verse 4, we read of God's kindness to his people. So our second heading is this. we see the clear command of the Lord and it comes through Deborah who enters the story at verse 4.

[18:04] Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah. Do you see her palm? It's between Bethel and Ramah.

It's a little golden palm. We're looking down at Israel from about 50 miles up in space, so it was quite a big tree. So she sat under the palm of Deborah and that's where the people came up to her for judgment, so the account says.

So we learn from here that she was a prophetess, that she was married. We hear no more about Lapidoth, so we don't know about him. But she was Israel's judge and leader and she was obviously well known all over Israel because people would be able to come and ask her advice and get her to give judgments, to settle disputes.

So it was a kind of outdoor courtroom and this palm tree was obviously so well known that it was nicknamed Deborah's palm tree. Now returning to our map, it's interesting to see from verse 5 that she operated right down here in the south between Bethel and Ramah, much further south than the action of Judges chapter 4, about 70 or 80 miles further south and yet she knew about Barak which suggests that he was known in Israel to be a capable soldier.

Why else might she have sent for him? Now friends, I want to leave the motorway for a moment on our journey tonight and go off into a service station.

[19:34] The motorway is called the warfare of the Lord. That's what this chapter is all about and we'll get back there in a couple of minutes. But the service station we're going to take a little break in is called Men's and Women's Leadership Roles in the People of God.

So I want us to take a brief cup of coffee in that service station because inevitably the appearance of Deborah as both a prophetess and a judge and leader raises questions in minds like ours which have been made alert and sensitive to these things by their prominence in the modern world.

Just a couple of minutes, we can't answer all the questions but let me make two observations which I hope will be helpful. The Bible's basic position is that men and women in the sight of God are equal in status and in dignity but different and complementary in function.

So they're equally important and valuable but they don't have fully interchangeable roles. So in marriage the husband is the leader and his wife is the helper. But in society at large I don't see any reason why a woman should not occupy the most senior roles in education or in business or in politics as Deborah does here.

[20 : 47] but the complementarity and the difference in role is clearly shown here in Judges chapter 4. The male judges right the way through the book of Judges are military commanders so they lead their troops into battle as Gideon and Jephthah will do in later chapters or perhaps they perform solo feats of heroic warfare as Ehud did or as Samson did later but they're fighters.

their weapons are sword and spear or in Samson's case the jawbone of a donkey. But Deborah instinctively knows that it's not her job to put on her sword and armor and lead the troops out into battle.

She's not like the legend of Queen Boadicea of the Iceni tribe who according to the legend drove her chariot into battle furiously against the Romans in 60 AD with her golden hair flying out behind her.

No it's not like that. As soon as Deborah realizes that the time for fighting has come she sends for Barak from Kedesh Naphtali and she says to him in verse 6 here is the command of the Lord to you go and gather your 10,000 soldiers and engage Sisera's army.

So she recognizes that although she is the leader in Israel and the judge the role of leading the army into battle belongs to a man. Equal in status different in function it's displayed for us there.

[22 : 15] Now secondly there's nothing in the account of Deborah which fails to sit happily with the teaching of the apostle Paul in the New Testament. You'll know that Paul allows and assumes that women are going to speak in certain ways in the meetings of the church.

So in 1 Corinthians he speaks of women praying out loud during a church meeting and prophesying during church meetings. He doesn't say they must but he certainly allows women to.

The one speaking role that he doesn't allow women to take is that of the authoritative teaching of the church what we might today call the pulpit ministry. That role is reserved for men.

In fact in each of the two testaments of the Bible there is one role that is only for men. In the Old Testament it's the priesthood which is only for men and in the New Testament it's the role of the pastor teacher preaching to the church which is only for men.

But Paul very much encourages women Christians to be active in other forms of teaching and training. You've only got to read the delightful 16th and final chapter of Romans to see how much Paul admires and respects and endorses the ministry of capable Christian women.

[23 : 30] So Deborah is not a priest and she recognizes that military leadership must be taken by a man but she is the leader and judge of Israel and she has a gift of prophecy which the Lord harnesses at this critical moment in the history of Israel.

So we'll leave the service station and get back onto the motorway which is all about the warfare of the Lord. So here's our second point the clear command of the Lord as it comes through Deborah the prophetess.

The Lord furthers his purpose of warfare as he speaks his commands into the ears of his servant Barak. Now we mustn't underplay Deborah's role in Israel.

We mustn't say that she was no more than a mouthpiece of the word of the Lord. Just look across to her song the song of Deborah in the next chapter chapter 5. Let me read verses 6 and 7.

I won't attempt to sing them but let me read verses 6 and 7. In the days of Shamgar son of Anath in the days of Jael the highways were abandoned and travelers kept to the byways.

[24 : 39] The villagers ceased in Israel. They ceased to be until I arose. I Deborah arose as a mother in Israel. So what she's saying there is that village life was in such a dreadful state in Israel it was as though the villagers had virtually disappeared.

They'd gone to ground like moles until this mighty mother figure rose up. I Deborah arose as a mother in Israel. I can't help thinking that Mrs. Merkel in Germany is regarded rather like this. I think they call her mother don't they? What is the German for mother? Yeah exactly. I didn't hear a word of that but anyway whatever it is I think that's what they call her.

So Deborah a little bit like that. She was a wise strong woman whose leadership qualities were recognized throughout the land. In fact if she wasn't regarded as the nation's mother why on earth should Barak have traveled all that way from Kedesh Naphtali to answer her summons?

If she had been a person of small account he would have said Deborah who? But clearly as soon as the message reached Barak he was on his way south to the hill country of Ephraim making for the famous palm tree so as to receive his instructions and those instructions the words of Deborah to him are recorded here in verses 6 and 7 of chapter 4 and notice as I read them that they are all about the Lord and not about Deborah.

[26 : 13] So chapter 4 verse 6 she says has not the Lord the God of Israel commanded you go gather your men at Mount Tabor taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun and I that's the Lord and I will draw out Sisera the general of Jabin's army to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops and I the Lord will give him into your hand.

It's not about Deborah is it? She's not pulling rank or seniority she's not saying look Barak I'm old enough to be your mother and I've been leading this nation for decades and I've gained a lot of wisdom from my experiences so I want you to summon an army to engage Sisera's 900 chariots no it's all about the Lord has not the Lord the God of Israel commanded you?

This is not about Deborah's warfare it's the Lord's warfare and look how clear the Lord's command to Barak is has not the Lord commanded you? And if Barak's immediate reaction to the command of verse 6 might have been to feel yikes this is too big a job for me the Lord immediately gives him a crystal clear reassurance in verse 7 I the Lord will draw out Sisera to meet you by the river Kishon and I will give him into your hand now that's a promise of victory the clear command which is a challenging proposition is immediately backed up by a promise from the very mouth of God that all will go well and the 900 chariots will be defeated now friends that is what our God is like he gives his servants some daunting commands which involve warfare and wounds and struggle but he promises victory in the end to those who engage in his warfare it's a great bible pattern take up the heavenly weaponry engage the enemy and I will be with you says the

Lord and I will bring you through victorious well we've seen the terrifying power of the enemy the clear command of the Lord and now thirdly the faithful obedience of the soldier and this is Barak now how do we think of Barak how do we categorize Barak he's a soldier and he has an army of 10,000 men at his heels as verse 10 tells us also as verse 22 tells us he's willing to follow up Sisera on foot so he seems to be both energetic and brave he's also a singer songwriter as chapter 5 verse 1 tells us as well many people have also said that he's a wimp because he says to Deborah in verse 8 if you will go with me to the battle I'll go but if you will not go with me I will not go so people have said Nambi Pambi Barak having to hide behind the aprons of Aunt Deborah is he a man or a mouse now I think that's a wrong view of Barak perhaps if you can keep your finger in Judges 4 see if you can find Hebrews chapter 11 for a moment you'll find this on page 1008 it's just worth us looking at this together now Hebrews 11 1008 Hebrews 11 is a chapter celebrating faith faith and faithfulness of various Old Testament figures and the author of Hebrews writes this chapter because he's wanting to encourage his readers to exercise faith so he's saying to them look at the examples of many of those who've gone before and imitate their examples but it's not just faith that Hebrews 11 is commending it's faith expressed in perseverance and obedience faith in the Bible I'll say this really for those who are perhaps quite new to the faith and perhaps new to our church faith in the

[30 : 17] Bible is not believing in God faith in the Bible of course it includes believing in God but faith in the Bible is believing that what God promises God will deliver so if you really believe that God will deliver what he has promised it means you're prepared to face any amount of hardship and struggle in the present because you trust God to bless you with what he's promised you in the end this is the kind of faith described and taught in Hebrews chapter 11 the faith that is so certain of the eventual future blessings that it's willing to endure difficulty and hardship in the present now the author of Hebrews in his 11th chapter commends the faith of a number of well-known people so he mentions Abel Enoch Noah Abraham Sarah Isaac Jacob Joseph Moses Rahab the prostitute verse 31 and then he's just beginning to run out of time when he gets to verse 32 I guess he's not wanting to test his readers patience too much but he says this in verse 32 what more shall I say for time would fail me to tell of

I'm going to tell them anyway but so time isn't really going to fail me to tell of Gideon Barak Barak Samson Jephthah David Samuel and the prophets wimps certainly not look at what they did because they were men of faith verse 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms enforced justice obtained promises stopped the mouths of lions that's not something you do more than twice a week is it quench the power of fire escape the edge of the sword were made strong out of weakness

became mighty in war put foreign armies to flight they did these very difficult things because they trusted that God would deliver on his promises that even if they died as they obeyed the Lord they trusted that he would raise them to everlasting life so friends I think we can comprehensively de-wimp Barak the fact that he appears here in

Hebrews 11 confirms that he was someone who had the courage of his convictions someone who was willing to risk his life in obeying the Lord's commands and trusting the Lord's promises so back to Judges 4 in verses 6 and 7 you see God has done two things for Barak first he has commanded him to raise an army and fight and second he has promised him victory over the dreaded Sisera in short order Barak has heard the command of the Lord and the promise of the Lord and in verse 8 the so called wimp verse he's saying to Deborah I want to be in closest possible touch with the word of the Lord if I'm to do this difficult thing if you the Lord's prophetess will come with me I shall be under the guidance of the Lord at every step but I'm not willing to take on this very difficult task without the word of the Lord to counsel and direct me so verse 8 is an expression of Barak's ongoing trust in the word of the Lord verse 8 is the main reason why Barak is listed as a man of faith in Hebrews chapter 11 and just look on to verse 14 in our passage when the armies are ready for battle Deborah says to Barak up for this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand does not the Lord go out before you so Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him and the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army before Barak by the edge of the sword again we have command and promise from the Lord up that's the command it's a fairly short one but it speaks volumes up and at it Barak the hour has come and promise does not the Lord go out before you which means you can be certain of his presence and the victory he will give you as promised back in verse 7 so that's why he wanted to take Deborah with him not to take her onto the field of battle to hold his hand but to be with him just before the battle so as to speak the

Lord's message to him so let's notice three things about Barak which demonstrate that he's a man of faith and these are three things for us to imitate as well first faith means listening to the Lord at every point in life and in every circumstance that's why our Bibles need to be dog-eared and broken backed I hope you have a dog-eared broken backed Bible because it means that you're always reading it faith listens secondly faith is showing courage and obedience in the face of real adversity under normal military circumstances Barak's 10,000 men would have been no match for Cicero's state-of-the-art chariots but the Lord kept his promise and Barak trusted the promise and third faith takes on challenges where there is no honor and glory involved Deborah had said to Barak in verse nine nevertheless the road on which you're going will not lead to your glory for the

[35 : 46] Lord will sell Cicero into the hand of a woman the woman of course was not Deborah it was jail no glory for you Barak really he might have thought won't I get a knighthood wouldn't I get perhaps a peerage not even a measly little MBE no no glory you'll even be misunderstood and thought of in centuries to come as more mouse than man so there's faith listening to the Lord showing courage and obedience and tackling a hard task knowing that there's no glory involved not for you in any way to whom then does the glory really go not to jail but to the one to whom the glory always rightly belongs and that is the Lord himself so let's look finally forth at the decisive victory of the Lord at the risk of overkill let me point out again the key features of Deborah's prophetic words verse 6 has not the Lord the God of Israel commanded you verse 7 the Lord is speaking

I will draw out Sisera to meet you by the river Kishon and I will give him into your hand verse 9 the Lord will sell Sisera verse 14 this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand does not the Lord go out before you now Deborah herself doesn't speak again in chapter 4 but the author of Judges writes in exactly the same way look at the way he puts it in verse 15 and the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army yes verse 16 tells us that Barak followed in hot pursuit but it was the Lord who conquered Sisera and his army and then look at the author's summary of the day's work in verse 23 so on that day God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan now here's a thing to notice when the Lord achieves his victories in the Bible he rarely does things without human agency he does just occasionally so the great flood came at his command without involving human beings or the fire and brimstone with which he swallowed up

Sodom and Gomorrah came as it were direct from heaven but usually the Lord involves human agents and that's what happens here as I'll try to show there's actually an extraordinary moment in this tale from verse 4 to verse 10 everything is being set up or staged you might say for the great battle of the river Kishon and when we reach verse 10 we can picture in our mind's eye the calling

out of the troops 10,000 men from the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali we see them as it were strapping on their swords and helmets and rushing to the slopes of Mount Tabor and don't you love that phrase 10,000 men went up at Barak's heels like a great pack of hounds and Deborah went up with him so there they are up the slopes of Mount Tabor don't worry about that it's okay you can imagine the little mountain there they are halfway up the slope so they have the advantage of the hillside all ready to rush down on the enemy it's great to be a little bit uphill shouting rather like William Wallace and his men shouting a Wallace a Wallace so there we are poised at verse 10 and what happens next verse 11 now Heba the Kenite had separated from the Kenites the descendants of Hobab the father in law of Moses and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zarnanim which is near Kadesh really what a fascinating piece of information for members of the camping and caravan club bear that in mind friends when you're next touring in Israel won't you there's a good campsite in Zarnanim near to the old oak tree there strange thing to read isn't it of course the truth is this is a little jewel of the storyteller's art the writer is suddenly diverting us to a scene which is about to become very important in the defeat of Sisera the Kenites the Kenite tribe and we learn this from Judges chapter one they'd all gone to the far south to the Negev to the wilderness of Judah right up much further south even than the Dead

Sea but Heber the Kenite along with his gifted wife had left the other Kenites and they journeyed north to Zarnanim near Kedesh and we're meant to understand of course that this is the providence of God who guided circumstances so that the right tent peg was in the right hand at the right time and in the right place and the story is beautifully told Sisera gets out of his chariot and he flees away ignominiously on foot all his soldiers fall in the battle not a man was left says verse 16 only Sisera by now a pathetic and exhausted figure and he's fleeing and he remembers in his weary state that Heber and Jael are living under canvas quite close by and they're on good terms with his master Jabin the king so he makes for the tent thinking I've got some safety come in come in my lord don't be afraid lie down here you're worn out

[41 : 17] I'll cover you with a rug I guess it was a hot day but if you're exhausted you get cold don't you I'll cover you with a rug have you got a drop of water I'm dying of thirst I've got some fresh milk I'll open a brand new carton look look jail do me a great favor I've got to sleep I'm exhausted will you stand guard at the door and if a man comes and asks is anyone here say no of course now in those ancient days putting up the tent was women's work I guess if you go camping as a family it's probably the father who does it isn't it but in those days it was the women not the men who knew how to hammer a tent peg home with a few well-aimed blows jail could handle a tent peg and a hammer as well as a master joiner today can handle a saw and a plane and she did but I'll leave the rest I won't try and retell that part of the story you can just picture that can't you anyway a little bit later on

Barak comes along looking for Sisera and Jael sees him coming and she goes out to meet him come she says to Barak and I will show you the man that you're looking for now you can imagine Barak approaching the tent flap at this point sword drawn in his hand if the man he's looking for is inside he's going to do him in he's as wary as a cat and he looks in there is the corpse on the floor dead Eglon it happened to him in chapter 3 and Sisera again here in chapter 4 verse 22 so he went into her tent and there lay Sisera dead with the tent peg in his temple and to be killed by a woman was considered a very great humiliation it happens to somebody else in Judges chapter nine a bimelech gets killed by a millstone that's chucked over the wall and that's a great disgrace to him as well so verse 23 on that day God subdued

Jabin the king of Canaan before the people of Israel and the hand of the people of Israel pressed harder and harder against Jabin the king of Canaan until they destroyed Jabin king of Canaan well we're almost done friends but let me just say one final thing I think it can come as a shock to us especially to younger Christians to realize that the Lord is a warrior and that he summons his people to take up arms in his cause not of course the arms of swords and spears and guns certainly not but the weapons of prayer and the gospel so let me ask do we as a congregation do we see ourselves as a unit in the Lord's army called to fight for the truth of the gospel in Scotland and in the wider world the Bible is many things but one thing it is is a battle manual it trains us to be fighters all of us naturally shrink from conflict but if we are to follow the pattern of Jesus we have to engage the enemy and be willing to endure hardship and at times great unpopularity let me also ask this question to each individual do you see yourself yet as a fighter in the Lord's army again I ask this particularly to the younger ones here I know that I been a Christian

for quite a few years before I began to see that it was necessary to be willing to contend for the faith now we do this in different ways not everyone in Christ's army can be a debater or a writer or a public speaker but the Lord's army has many departments there's the prayer squadron for example there's the catering corps there's the administrative wing very important there's the youth section and much else Deborah and Barak wrote a rather good song in chapter five we need the singers and the song writers and so on but the message of

Judges chapter four is that the Lord is committed in the cause of ultimate final peace he's committed to fighting everything that opposes his people so that he can finally rescue them and he calls us every one of us to join with him in the battle let's bow our heads and we'll pray a prayer to the Lord Jesus our dear Lord Jesus we thank you so much that you were willing to come to earth as the champion of the human race the one who stepped out before us and did for us the thing that we could not possibly do for ourselves we thank you that you were willing to engage the enemy in battle and indeed wonderfully and decisively to defeat him we thank you for that victory won by you at such great cost and whose benefits we so greatly enjoy today please help us dear

[46 : 38] Lord Jesus to follow in your footsteps to be willing to be hurt if necessary and wounded in the struggle and yet knowing that we have your glorious promise that all who believe and trust in you shall inherit eternal life and we ask it for your great name's sake amen