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In the past, I mentioned that the “Hall of Faith Heroes” in Hebrews chapter 11 includes people who were not very good people. Like Samson. Robbie Dean commented on the connection between the book of Judges and Hebrews chapter 11 in his new course on Judges. Let me quote from it:

“But if you read the book of Judges as it was intended, it is not necessarily a positive thing. It doesn't paint these guys with bright colors, showing how wonderful they are. The picture is really of deterioration and the degradation and the paganization of the people and the leadership. The reason we get this good idea, this optimistic idea of these people in Judges is from Hebrews 11. And I thank God that this is here because this is a real testimony to grace.

“One day you and I will be standing at the Judgment Seat of Christ and we are going to be evaluated. I don't know about you, but I can look at my life and be pretty hard and say. I am not going to show up too well when I get to the Judgment Seat of Christ. There are a whole lot more failures than there were successes. And I may be the only one that knows that. It's not going to go well at the Judgment Seat of Christ. And then you read Hebrews. And then you realize what absolute failures some of these people were 95% of the time. And here they are in what some call the Hall of Faith chapter. It is a hall of heroes because at one point in their life when everything was at stake, they trusted God. They might have...like Samson. Nothing good is said about Samson in the book of Judges. Not one thing positive. And yet we get here and here he is listed. So God's evaluation at the Judgment Seat of Christ for us is not going to be quite as harsh as your judgment of yourself would be or others might be of you.”

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**Judges 4:15 And the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot.**

**Judges 4:16 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.**

**Judges 4:17 Now Sisera fled on foot to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.**

**Sisera fled on foot.** This is the second time Sisera is said to flee. He fled in verse 15 and he continues to flee. Now he flees on foot. No longer does he have his chariot. It is probably stuck in the mud in the River Kishon. So he abandoned it.

Here is an interesting parallel between Sisera and Barak. Deborah called Barak to her tree. She gives him a message from God: a message of victory. Sisera flees to the tent of another woman, Jael, who called him to her tent. It is of course, near another tree. Here, Sisera receives a “message” of death (a tent peg through his brain) much like Eglon did at the hand of Ehud. Remember? Ehud had a message from God for Eglon. Except here, a woman does the deed.

A reminder: When Othniel was deliverer, he just went and accomplished the deliverance.

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But here, due to the deterioration of the society, individual tasks of the deliverance are made visible and done by different people.

**There was peace.** The word is “shalom,” peace. Remember that Heber is not a son of Israel, even though some of the Kenite’s helped the sons of Israel. But this peace is used by Jael to deceive Sisera. Again, this is similar to what Ehud did to Eglon. Ehud feigned being a friend only to kill him as he might kill a sacrificial animal.

Deception is used in war to throw the enemy off. Perhaps some of you may remember either the book or the movie, “The Man Who Never Was.” Wikipedia says of the movie, “It is based on the book of the same name by Lt. Cmdr. Ewen Montagu and chronicles Operation Mincemeat, a 1943 British intelligence plan to deceive the Axis powers into thinking the Allied invasion of Sicily would take place elsewhere in the Mediterranean.” Deceive. Throughout Judges, the deliverers use deception.

**Judges 4:18 And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, “Turn aside, my master, turn aside to me! Do not be afraid.” So he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug.**

**Jael went out to meet Sisera.** How did Jael know Sisera was headed her way? We may never know. She obviously was aware of the battle that had taken place. She probably saw Barak and his farmer troops “marching as to war.” She seems to have an understanding that Sisera has been defeated and needs a place to hide and rest. And in all this, where was Heber, her husband? We do not have answers to these questions. The answers are not given because they are not needed for this narrative. Sometimes adding a detail might send us on a wild goose chase causing us to deviate from our study of the pertinent concepts being portrayed.

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John chapter 5, “there was a feast of the Jews,” is an example. Commentators spend too much time trying to determine which feast of the Jews this is rather than asking questions about this generic feast and why that is important to the narrative in that passage.

There is another interesting note on the word used here for “to meet.” In the dictionary, there are two different verbs with the same three letters for a root. One means to call, the other, the one used here, means to meet.

Also observe, that like many other descriptions of motion in the book of Judges, two verbs are used. Here, Jael first is said to go out, and then “to meet.” The first one indicates what she actually did. The second one, in the infinitive expresses intentions or the purpose of her going out. She didn’t go out and just happen to meet him. She went out with the express purpose of meeting him.

**Turn aside.** This word has already been used in the book of Judges:

**Judges 2:17 Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they committed infidelity with other gods and bowed down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the Lord; they did not do the same as their fathers.**

**They turned aside.** The word also means deviate from a path. So they deviated from the “way.” The word is used three times here Judges chapter 4: twice as imperatives from Jael and once to indicate Sisera complied with the command.

In Judges 4:17 the text says Sisera was fleeing to Jael’s tent. Yet, in Judges 4:18, it would appear that Sisera was on his way somewhere other than Jael’s tent, or maybe he was lost. She convinced him to “deviate”

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from his path. It was easy to convince him: 1) He was dead tired having fought all day, 2) He had lost his entire army, “not even one was left,” 3) the trip just to the vicinity of Jael’s tent was difficult trying to evade Israelites who were looking for him, bad weather, and difficult terrain (Mt. Tabor perhaps). But he deviated, like the sons of Israel deviated from the correct path of worship of Yahweh.

**Master.** She addresses him with the Hebrew word “adoni,” translated lord or master. It is sometimes used of God. It is a title of respect. By all appearances, she is treating him as a friend and ally. Deception. In both chapter 3 and here in chapter 4, deception is used to put the “victim” at ease before the kill.

**Covered.** Per the TDOT, “The primary meaning of kasa is “cover,” either to render invisible what is covered or to protect it or keep it warm. Jael covers the fugitive Sisera with a rug (semika) to hide him (Jgs. 4:18f.)” In this case, it is to make him think he is hidden. It gives him a false sense of security. The verb is in the Piel, the intensive form of the verb.

**Rug.** This is a hapax legomenon, meaning this is the only place in the Bible this word is used. Translations possible are rug, cover, quilt, blanket. Now, here, I am going to speculate a little. If the milk comes from sheep or goats, then the rug could have been made from sheep skin and wool. If they got the milk from sheep or goats, they had a flock from which they could draw on for meat and wool. Today in modern Greece, there is such a type of rug. It is called “flokati.”

**Into the tent.** There is a thread of the fabric of Scripture here. I will not cover it here at this time.

**Judges 4:19 And he said to her, “Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.” So she opened a leather bottle of milk and gave him a drink; then she covered him.**

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**Please give me a little water to drink.** Literally, “give me to drink, please, a little water.” We will revisit this phrase in a few verses. He asks for water. You have likely run across this phrase somewhere else in the Bible.

**Milk.** In the Western world today, we immediately think of cow’s milk. So, let us listen to what the TDOT says:

“To determine the way the ancient Israelites used milk, we must draw on the scanty literary evidence in the usage of the Arabs, both settled and nomadic. We know that they prefer the milk of sheep and goats to that of cows.”

“Only Jgs 4:19 states that milk is considered a beverage, even more refreshing than water. In this verse, *chalabh* undoubtedly means not fresh milk but the slightly fermented and somewhat curdled milk that is a good thirst-quencher, called *laban* by the Arabs.”

Interesting that it says “slightly fermented.” My understanding is that fermentation represents decay and corruption. As Gordon Wenham says in his Leviticus commentary talking about why food items with yeast were forbidden during Passover, “No rationale for the ban on the use of yeast in sacrifice is provided in the Bible. Most commentators reckon that yeast and honey were prohibited because they cause fermentation. This they believe was unacceptable because it suggested corruption.”

Jael did not give Sisera “uncorrupted” water. No, she gave him fermented milk which may have indicated corruption. He represents the corruption of the Canaanite society that had infected Israelite life. On the positive side, laban was a refreshing drink. Jael gave Sisera more than he asked for.

**I am thirsty.** Could be translated, “I thirst.” Have we encountered this phrase somewhere else in the Bible? We will revisit this and other phrases after Sisera dies.

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**She covered him.** The verb is in the Piel, the intensive form of the verb. This is the second time that she is said to cover him.

**Judges 4:20 And he said to her, “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.’”**

Sisera is asking Jael to lie. There is of course, one way she can avoid lying. She can kill him. Then she can really say, there is no one here.

**Judges 4:21 But Jael, Heber’s wife, took a tent peg and a hammer in her hand, and went secretly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went through into the ground; for he was sound asleep and exhausted. So he died.**

**Exhausted.** It is translated OK. The LXX translates this by a word that can mean, “tremble/confuse/dismay/upset/trouble/faint/displace.” Have you ever been so tired that it seems you are living in a dream. Things seem surreal. And when you finally put your head down on the pillow, that is the last thing you remember because you fall asleep immediately. He was, as we might say, “dead tired.” Sorry. The pun was too good to resist. Here, Sisera lays down and falls asleep immediately. And that is the last thing he ever remembered until he reached “Torments,” the waystation on the way to the Lake of Fire. The Second Death.

**2 Samuel 21:15 Now when the Philistines were at war with Israel again, David went down, and his servants with him; and when they fought against the Philistines, David became weary.**

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The same word is used of David related to combat. Similar to Sisera. He was in combat and then journeyed several miles to Jael's tent. He was exhausted.

**Judges 4:22 And behold, while Barak was pursuing Sisera, Jael came out to meet him and said to him, "Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking." So he entered with her, and behold, Sisera was lying dead with the tent peg in his temple.**

**And behold.** This is the Hebrew multifunction word "and" plus a demonstrative particle. Per Robert Chisholm, "The disjunctive clause in verse 22a dramatically invites the audience to share an observer's perspective." This particle is repeated a second time in this verse when Jael points out the dead corpse of Sisera. The original author of the story, likely Deborah, is trying to pull us into the narrative to experience the emotion of those involved. When we get to chapter 5, if you have been pulled into the narrative successfully, you will want to sing God's praises in chapter 5 along with Deborah and Barak. In church, we sing also. We sing praises to God. Do you have something to praise God about? Sing!

**While Barak.** Narratives are often told in a sequential order. Here, two things are happening simultaneously. Barak is pursuing Sisera and Jael is coming out to Barak to show him Sisera's corpse. The words have to be written sequentially, but some of the action is taking place in parallel.

I mention this to point out that most people can easily visualize two or more actions happening simultaneously. I have met people who have great difficulty visualizing simultaneous actions. Everything has to happen in a serial, sequential fashion. This verse might not be acceptable to this kind of person. It says Barak pursued Sisera. But, the narrative has already declared him dead. So how can he now be chased by Barak?



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Deborah had just gone out to meet Sisera before she killed him. Barak does not yet know this, yet. The reader does. If this were a movie we would be shouting to Barak, “Your enemy, Sisera, is dead!” Now Deborah goes out to meet Barak to show him the dead body. The word “while” is translated from the multifunction Hebrew word for “and.” The writer is beckoning the reader to enter her world, to almost participate in the action.

**Pursuing.** This word is used twice in this chapter, both of Barak. In verse 16 he pursued the chariots and army of Sisera...”and not one was left.” Except, that is, Sisera. So, Barak continues his pursuit, chasing after Sisera. We are not told how Barak tracked him down. Did he correctly figure that Sisera would go to Heber? Or did he have lookouts tracking Sisera’s movements. Remember, from Josephus, and even chapter 5, there was bad weather resulting in a torrent of water washing over many of the enemy troops. It would have been difficult to track him. All we know is that Barak is chasing Sisera.

Sisera was lying dead. This reminds me of that happened in Hezekiah’s day in Isaiah 37. Sennacherib’s army surrounded Jerusalem. Hezekiah sends a request for a prayer to Isaiah. Reminds me of that prayer General Patton asked for in WWII. God answered Hezekiah:

**Isaiah 37:36 Then the angel of the Lord went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when the rest got up early in the morning, behold, all of the 185,000 were dead (literally, dead corpses).**

So Sisera is now a dead corpse.

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**Judges 4:23 So God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan on that day before the sons of Israel.**

**God.** It is the second word in the sentence. It reads “and subdued God on day that...” But for an English speaking theologically-oriented audience, it is God that accomplished the action. We must never forget. Our success in the Christian life is God’s work. It is only our faith that is required.

**Subdued.** This repeats the concept that was brought out with this word in chapter 3:

**Judges 3:30 So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel.**

But here in chapter 4, the emphasis is on the fact that God did this. He subdued Jabin. As I have explained previously about the 10,000. God wanted witnesses that had participated in His work. But, it was His work.

**Before the sons of Israel.** I love the Hebrew here. “Before” is literally “in the faces of the sons of Israel.” It is almost like one of the Greek verbs for seeing in the New Testament that can be translated as “panoramic view.” The sons of Israel had a panoramic view of God’s work. They were spectators as well as participants. And so are we when we walk by faith, trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Judges 4:24 And the hand of the sons of Israel pressed harder and harder upon Jabin the king of Canaan, until they had eliminated Jabin the king of Canaan.**

**Pressed harder and harder.** Literally, “grew stronger the hand of the sons of Israel, harder and stronger.” But hidden here is an infinitive absolute of the word for walk! This infinitive absolute is not the usual

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usage which uses two forms of the same verb to emphasize the action. No. Here the infinitive absolute stands alone as an adjective. By doing so, it can only emphasize this more. Once embolden with their victory against Sisera, Jabin's commander, they appear to have gone to faith. They saw God's work in their lives. Now, for a while, they trust God to empower them against their enemy. Let God's victories in your life embolden you to continue in your faith walk.

**Eliminated.** This is used in the Torah, and other places, for Israelites that had done something horrific and were "cut off from their people." It is also used of "cutting" a treaty and for cutting down the Asherah idols.

**King of Canaan.** Here once again, is a non-Israelite king to whom they had become enslaved due to their slavery to the idols of Canaan. Robbie Dean makes the point, that although they worshipped idols of wood and stone, they were representatives of demons. We are doing the same things today in America. Will God respond to our prayers for another deliverer?

This is the end of chapter 4. Chapter 5 is a psalm/song of praise to God for His action in delivering Israel. It gives us a different perspective, a commentary of sorts and provides additional details not presented in chapter 4.

Here is a sort of appendix to our study of chapter 4.

I couldn't help going back to John chapter 4, the woman at the well in Samaria with Jesus. He starts the conversation saying, "Give me to drink." In Judges 4, the "bad guy, the representative of evil, the person from whom Israel needs to be delivered, Sisera, asks the woman of the tent, "give me to drink." Jesus, the deliverer/savior, asks the Samaritan woman (representative of evil in the eyes of the Jews in Jesus' day), "give me to drink." Both Sisera and Jesus were "weary." In Sisera's case, in verse 21, the text says that Sisera was "exhausted." you can also infer this from his defeat at the hands of the Israelites and his "fleeing" from the River Kishon to a location on the other side of Mount Tabor.

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Whether intended or not, there are parallels between Judges 4 and John 4.

1. Man (Sisera/Jesus) alone with a woman in a dialogue.
2. Man (Sisera/Jesus) is exhausted/weary.
3. Man (Sisera/Jesus) says, “Give me to drink.”
4. In Judges 4 Sisera says, “I thirst.” Although not specifically said, it is inferred in John 4. And of course, from the cross, Jesus says, “I thirst.”
5. Jael gives Sisera, not water, but *laban*, a slightly fermented milk drink. He ends up dead. Jesus asks for a drink of water, but ends up giving the woman at the well “living water” leading to eternal life.
6. A logical question in Judges is where is Jael’s husband? That question also comes up in John 4.