

Judges Chapter 4 Part 2

Outline (based upon Thomas Constable & Robert Dean):

Judges 1:1 – 3:6 The reason for Israel's apostasy

**Judges 3:7 – 16:31 The record of Israel's apostasy
[& God's Deliverance]**

Judges 17:1 – 21:25 The results of Israel's apostasy

As an overview of the second section here is outline of the section based upon a combination of Thomas Constable, J. Vernon McGee and Robert Chisholm.

- A. The first apostasy 3:7-11 [judge: Othniel] 3:7 “The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord...”
- B. The second apostasy 3:12-31 [judge: Ehud] 3:12 “Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord.”
- C. The third apostasy chapters 4—5 [judge: Deborah and Barak] 4:1 “Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord...”**
- D. The fourth apostasy 6:1—10:5 [judge: Gideon] 6:1 “Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.”
- E. The fifth apostasy 10:6—12:15 [judge: Jephthah] 10:6 “Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord...”
- F. The sixth apostasy chapters 13—16 [judge: Samson] 13:1 “Now the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord...”

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Here is an outline of Judges chapter 4 from Thomas Constable who shows us a chiastic structure:

A The sons of Israel are oppressed (vv. 1-3).

B Deborah, the prophetess, is featured (vv. 4-9).

C Barak and Sisera call out (vv. 10-13).

D Yahweh is Israel's warrior (v. 14a).

C' Barak and Sisera go down (vv. 14b-16).

B' Jael, wife of Heber, is featured (vv. 17-22).

A' Jabin, king of Canaan, is subdued (vv. 23-24).¹

Before I get too deep into chapter 4, I want to deal with the topic of judging people unfairly. Perhaps you have seen TV Law and Order episodes in which a man's son or daughter was murdered. He is out for revenge. He learns that the police are looking into a particular person. They think they have the murderer but lack key evidence to arrest that person. So, the father takes matters into his own hands and kills the suspect. Unfortunately, the suspect was just cleared due to a rock solid alibi. Now the father is a murderer.

The same attitude sometimes takes place by someone reading Scripture. For instance, In Acts chapter 1, did Peter sin by filling Judas' place in the apostles? He understood there were supposed to be 12. So he effectively chose a placeholder. Matthias was not appointed an apostle by Jesus Christ. I don't think he is ever said to be an apostle. He was numbered with the other disciples. And later on there is mention of the "12." But, Paul was not ready to take the place of Judas just yet. God didn't need a placeholder, but Peter did. His actions took place before the Church Age. And those actions set the stage for Paul.

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We see in the book of Judges that the sons of Israel needed a physical person to rule over them. Even then, they had troubles if that ruler was corrupt. And we now get to Barak and Deborah. All commentators say Barak was a weak man requiring Deborah to accompany him. That may be. But do they make much of his status in Hebrews chapter 11 as a faith hero? Can we point to verses that show Barak believed? I think we can. And no, I am not going to spoil the show by jumping to that passage. You will know when we get there.

Judges 4:1 Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, after Ehud died.

Again. The first word in the Hebrew. But it is not an adverb. It is the same verb found in Judges 3:12 and means “they continued.” They continued to do evil. An echo from Judges 3:12 and pointing back to the paradigm in Judges chapter 2. Interesting use of the word. By repeating it here after using it in chapter 3, it ties the two chapters together through the thread of “evil,” and then back to the paradigm. The Fabric of Scripture. It also emphasizes the continuing pattern of sin.

The sons of Israel did evil:

Judges 2:11 (paradigm) → 3:7 (Othniel) → 3:12 (Ehud) → 4:1 (Barak)
Again Again

Sight. Literally “eyes” but instead of plural it is the “dual,” meaning two. In other words, in the two eyes of God.

After Ehud died. Literally, “And Ehud was dead,” or “And Ehud had died.” The Hebrew word translated “after” by the NASB is multi-functional. It can be translated with many different words. After is an OK translation in this context. This is included at the beginning of this narrative in chapter 4 rather than at the ending of chapter 3 where you would have expected it. The author is again playing with words. He is emphasizing here that the sons of Israel lacked a physical human leader.

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They still rejected God as their king. So when the previous judge died, everyone went back to doing what was good in their own eyes which was sin.

There is something similar in the New Testament in John chapter 5.

Jesus performs a miracle and heals a lame man. The reader thinks, how can that be bad. Then the writer drops a bomb:

John 5:9 ...Now it was a Sabbath on that day.

Saying, “And Ehud had died.” is like that. You think ya ya ya, the sons of Israel are at it again. Why? Because they didn’t have a physical leader. God is their king but He is not visible. They have to have faith. Remember the Thomas episode in John 20? We will visit that passage in a little bit. Just a hint at what is to come.

Judges 4:2 So the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor; and the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim.

Read Joshua 11:1-11

Jabin. There was a previous king of Canaan named Jabin. Quite possibly, he was a descendant named for the original Jabin. Joshua defeated the first Jabin. Yet, here, Jabin’s forces defeat Israel.

Sold them. This is actually mentioned in the paradigm in chapter 2. But this is also a word that links to another action in this chapter.

Here are uses of “sold” so far in Judges:

Judges 2:14 (paradigm) → 3:8 (Othniel) → 4:2 (Barak) → 4:9 (Jael)

King ...reigned. King and reigned are from the same Hebrew root. The writer could have just said he was king. Instead, he added that he reigned. The emphasis causes us to revisit the Israelite’s need for a physical ruler.

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They are walking by sight, not by faith. King Jabin commanded and his subjects obeyed. And that includes the sons of Israel. That is what they are crying to God about. He has enslaved them. But, the reason they are enslaved to Jabin is that they first rejected their covenant God and enslaved themselves to the Canaanite deities of wood and stone. Back to that phrase, “There was no king in Israel.” They had rejected their God, the real God. But their God was not visible. That is the point of saying Ehud had died. They seem unable to handle the incredible freedom of not having a physical king over them. And even when they have a Hebrew king over them, unless that king is enforcing the commands of the covenant, they wander off into idolatry. I am saving the Thomas episode for later, but it is coming.

Hazor. This is a town in the north of Israel.

According to Thomas Constable:

“As long as Ehud lived, he kept Israel faithful to God (v. 1). However, after he died, God's people again "did evil," and turned from the Lord. In discipline, God allowed the Canaanites in the North to gain strength and dominate the Israelites for 20 years. The earlier oppressions were from outside Canaan, but now a leader within Canaan led an uprising against the Israelites. "Hazor," one of the largest cities in the Promised Land, again became the center of Canaanite power in this area. It had formerly organized a coalition of forces to fight against Joshua (cf. Josh. 11:1, 10). It stood on the main road connecting Egypt and Mesopotamia.”

Jabin. His name means "The Discerning," lit. "he will understand" per Thomas Constable.

Commander of his army. This introduces the main “bad guy.” King Jabin is in charge, but the guy that gets the job done is the commander of the army. In David’s day that was Joab.

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He lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. The second part of this place name is actually “the nations.” According to Thomas Constable it means, “The Woodlands of the Nations.” Interesting that the army headquarters where Sisera lives is located in a different place than where the king lives. There is some indication that the army was actually a coalition of forces based upon agreement with king Jabin and/or Sisera. The word “hagoyim” can be translated the gentiles. Interesting to note there is another place “of the Gentiles.” I would have missed this but Chris read part of Isaiah chapter 9:

Isaiah 9:1b ...In earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He will make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.

Interesting. In Judges 4, the troops that respond are from Zebulun and Naphtali. Galilee of the Gentiles is in the same area as the “Forest of the Gentiles.” Nazareth is in this area. Interesting.

Sisera. The main “bad guy.”

Judges 4:3 The sons of Israel cried out to the Lord; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years.

Cried out. This is not the same word used previously in the book of Judges (3:9, 3:15). But it is one of the two words used by Moses (Exodus 5:8,15; 8:12; 14:10,15; 15:25; 17:4; 22:23,27). The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT) says, “The major emphasis of the basic meaning of the root sq/zq falls on the loud and agonized “crying” of someone in acute distress, calling for help and seeking deliverance with this emotion-laden utterance.” And again, “The crying

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is thus a call for help in distress, which has as its goal immediate assistance in affliction and oppression.”

He had nine hundred iron chariots. The sons of Israel did not yet have iron technology. So, their weapons were not a match against those kingdoms that did have this technology. Previously, this did not matter when they were trusting God. From a human sin nature perspective, this was an impossible hurdle. **Iron chariots.** They are walking by sight and not by faith. But with any technology, it has a weakness.

Oppressed severely. Another echo from the Exodus generation.

From Trent Butler:

“The description of this oppression suggests it was more severe than those that preceded it. In the Othniel narrative Cushan-Rishathaim never appears as the subject of a verb; we are simply told that the Lord sold his people into the king’s hands and that Israel then served the king (3:8). The Ehud narrative, in addition to attributing the oppression to the Lord and noting that Israel served Eglon, attributes hostile actions to the Moabite king, but stops short of actually using a verb meaning “oppress” (3:13-14). However, this narrative specifically declares that Sisera “cruelly oppressed” Israel for a period of twenty years (which is longer than either of the earlier oppressions). The verb used (Hebrew) also appears in the Exodus account (Exod. 3:9), suggesting that Sisera’s treatment of Israel was on a par with Pharaoh’s. The adverb “cruelly” (Hebrew, literally, “with force”) emphasizes the severity of the oppression, while the reference to nine hundred iron chariots conjures up a rather terrifying mental image and suggests the apparent invincibility of the oppressor.”

The constant references or hints to the Exodus serves to remind the reader of the great deliverance by God on behalf of the sons of Israel. There is yet a great deliverance by God on behalf of the sons of Israel at the end of the Tribulation. How do you jog a believer’s memory to the

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grace of God? You continually remind Him of what God has already done. If God has already done the greater for you in salvation, do you think He will withhold the lesser blessings in time? That is, if you will only trust Him.

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:2 is the antidote to living in Canaan. Judges is illustrating that prescription. Walk by faith in God, not by sight and not by faith in the world. Cursed is the man who trusteth in man.

Jeremiah 17:5 This is what the Lord says: “Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the Lord.

Now for the delivering force.

Judges 4:4 Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time.

Deborah. Her name literally means “bee.” So say the commentaries and dictionaries. But, if you know some Hebrew, you know that most words are derived from a tri-literal root. Sometimes a word, just looking at it in text, could be derived from two or more different roots. So the student has to sort out which one. Here, there is some ambiguity introduced into the text. As Thomas Constable observes, “However, her name also suggests her prophetic role as she spoke to Barak, since the consonants in

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her name are the same as those in the Hebrew word translated "speak" and "word." Often a prophet will say that, "the Word (DaBaR) came to me saying..." Here then could be another "concealment" of the messages from God, in Deborah's name. The Bible reveals; the Bible conceals.

Wife. Most translations get this wrong. The word for woman is used twice in the Hebrew. Most translations skip over the first use. The second use would literally be the woman (wife) of Lappidoth. But the first use emphasizes that she is a woman. Literally, "And Deborah, a woman..." She is the one who is doctrinally oriented. She has the connection with God through the gift of prophecy. The men have deviated from the Word.

There is a true story told to me by a friend about a meeting in a Middle Eastern country many years ago. There were two Muslim Air Force colonels from the Middle Eastern country, two American men representing the US Air Force and a female USAF Major from the Pentagon at a conference table. My friend was also there. He spoke Arabic. But the Muslim colonels did not know that. The reason for the meeting was the purchase by the colonels of US hardware. The two Muslim colonels are conversing between themselves. The first colonel says the two American men are just after their money. "And," he says emphatically, "they brought a woman with them." The other colonel asserts, "But she is the smart one."

So here in Judges chapter 4, the woman is the smart one. She is a prophetess by the will of God. There are no men available to fill this role. In this chapter, there are role reversals. The women step in to fulfil roles that men seem unable to do. Wait until we get to chapter 5 when we learn that some of the tribes refused to help Barak free the sons of Israel from the slavery to Jabin.

Lappidoth. There is a question here. Is this a placename or a man's name? Could be translated as "torches." So Deborah could be a woman of torches. Per Robert Chisholm, he says: "Taking it as an abstract

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noun/attributive genitive, one could then translate the phrase “fiery one” or “spirited woman.” He considers the Hebrew favors translating this as wife of Lappidoth. Here is that ambiguity again.

Prophetess. She had the gift of prophet but not the office per Robbie Dean. She communicates information from God. But, she is not engaged in teaching Scripture.

Judging. Again, she is functioning as a judge. Typically, this would be a man per Exodus 18:21.

According to Thomas Constable there were two other women prophetesses in the Old Testament: Miriam (Exod. 15:20) and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14). We saw Huldah in connection with Josiah when we were reading Zephaniah.

Judges 4:5 She used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel went up to her for judgment.

Sit. Same root as “lived” in Judges 3:2 when “Sisera lived in ...”

Here is Robbie Dean’s comment on verse 5:

"She used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel," now the reason he calls it "the palm tree of Deborah" is because of the fact that she had sat there, by the time the writer writes this this had become the name of that location, "the palm tree of Deborah," and it was standard operating procedure in the ancient world that if you were a judge or if you were a prophetess then you would usually set up your place of operations in a grove of trees, a grove of palm trees, a grove of oak trees was typical in the Canaanite fertility worship so she is in a grove of palm trees and there she is adjudicating personal conflicts and

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legal conflicts in the nation. It is "between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment."

Judges 4:6 Now she sent *word* and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali, and said to him, "The Lord, the God of Israel, has indeed commanded, 'Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun.

She sent *word* and summoned. "Word," is in italics meaning it is not in the Hebrew text. She sent (as on a mission) and called (summoned). This summoning is the same word used of the calling of Samuel (1 Samuel chapter 3). Othniel and Ehud were commissioned. For Othniel, he was "raised up" or commissioned a deliverer in Judges 3:9. Ehud was "raised up" or commissioned a deliverer in Judges 3:15. Here, God uses an intermediary, Deborah, who was a prophetess to "call" Barak. His calling was an appointment, a commission. He responded in faith.

As a sidenote, there was a modern day Prime Minister of Israel (10th Prime Minister 1999-2001) named Ehud Barak. Ehud was a judge. Barak was a judge.

Go. The Masoretic (Hebrew text) says "go." But the LXX (Alexandrinus manuscript) says "to you." The original Hebrew was written without vowel points. So, the word was ambiguous except in a context. Here it is more than likely "go." The ambiguity gives the word some emphasis. You might first read "to you." This is apparently what the translators of the LXX did. Then you realize it is "to go." The ambiguity emphasizes what is not there.

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March. As this writer does often, when describing forces going into battle, he uses two words. The first word, go, is from the word to go, to walk. The word “march,” means march, deploy. It is interesting that it can also mean to draw out sound like blowing on the ram’s horn (Joshua 6:5). God is giving military orders to Barak via Deborah. He responded in faith. The word for faith is not found in the passage. But Barak receives instructions from God via Deborah. He obeyed the instructions.

Naphtali and Zebulun. A logical question would be why only the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun? Barak was from Naphtali so that is understandable. Zebulun was nearby. But so were other tribes. More on that later.

Judges 4:7 I will draw out to you Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his many troops to the river Kishon, and I will hand him over to you.”

Draw out. This is from the same root as the command God gave Barak to march or deploy troops. God uses the same Hebrew root here as in the previous verse when giving Barak instruction on positioning his troops.

Judges 4:8 Then Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.”

Barak is criticized for demanding that a woman go with him. Deborah apparently herself criticizes him. Is there possibly a point of view we are missing. Not saying Barak is correct, but this point of view is not considered by the commentators I read. That is, here is a prophetess who has a direct line to God. I trust God, but I want the latest intel from God. And as it turns out, she is key in getting him to attack. If she hadn’t been

there to goad him into action, he might have missed the opportunity presented by God.

9 She said, “I will certainly go with you; however, the fame shall not be yours on the journey that you are about to take, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.” Then Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh.

I will certainly go with you. This construction in the Hebrew is called an infinitive absolute. It is a means to emphasize the meaning. In this case, Deborah is emphasizing her commitment to travel with Barak.

10 Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh, and ten thousand men went up with him; Deborah also went up with him.

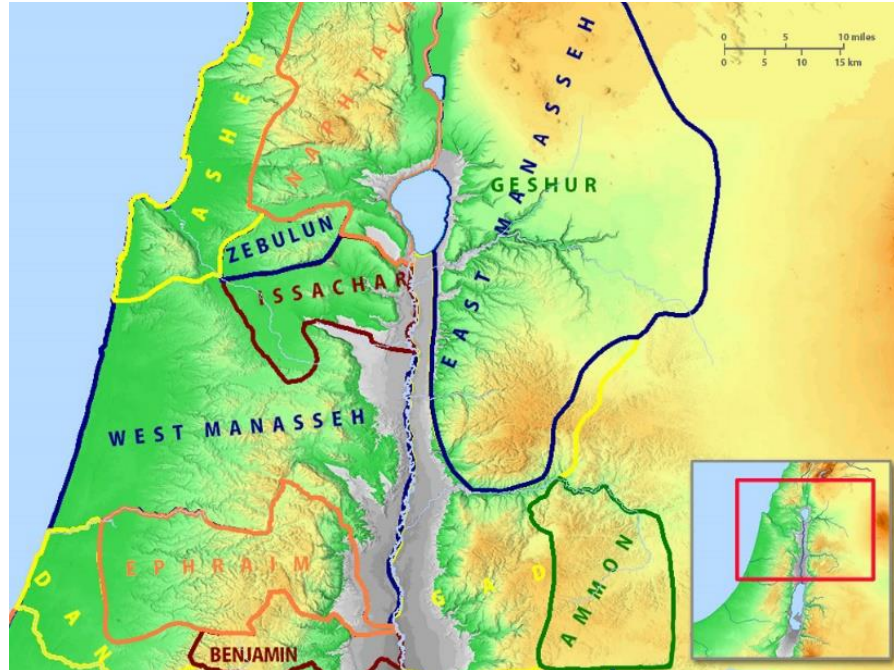
Is Barak not demonstrating his faith? What does Jesus say to “doubting” Thomas?

John 20:29 Jesus *said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you now believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.”

This is why Barak is in the faith hall of fame. He trusted a prophetess who spoke for God.

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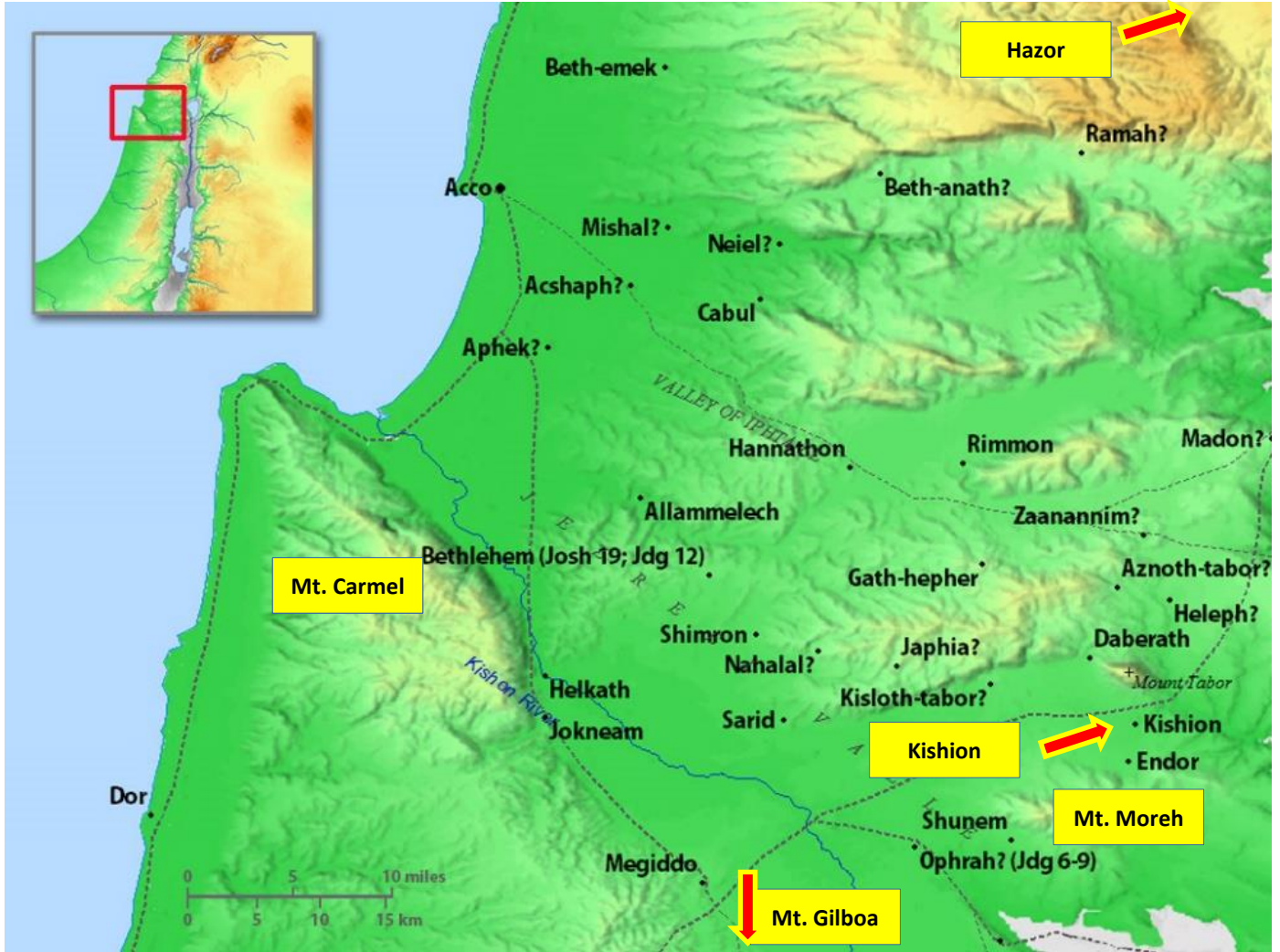
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This map shows us some of the place names in the area. Note Megiddo at the bottom of the map.

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I have added text in yellow boxes to highlight some placenames pertinent to our study.

I enlarged the map and highlighted place names of interest. Note the four mountains that form the valley of Jezreel.

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From Merrill Unger's Bible Dictionary:

“Megiddo occupied a very marked position on the southern rim of the plain of Esdraelon, the great battlefield of Palestine. It was famous for two great victories: of Barak over the Canaanites (Judg. 4:15), and of Gideon over the Midianites (Judg. 7); and for two great disasters: the deaths of Saul (I Sam. 31:8) and of Josiah (II Kings 23:29, 30; II Chron. 35:22). Armageddon becomes a poetical expression for terrible and final conflict.