

Hebrews 11:32

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets.

We left off with the story of Gideon which reminded us that apart from Christ we can do nothing; whereas, in contrast, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. In addition, the story of the water and the fleece revealed the plan of salvation to the Gentiles. It was an awesome study. If you forgot it, I encourage you to go back and listen.

Tonight we are going to study the story of Barak, which takes place right around 200 years after the Israelites left Egypt. We are in the time of the judges where Israel has for the most part turned their backs on their God. It is a very sad time where every man did what was right in his own eyes which resulted in the enemies of Israel ruling over them. Then when Israel would be in such intolerable pain they would finally remember their God and call on Him to help.

Being a faithful lover, the Lord would of course send help via a judge whom he would raise up to deliver Israel. But the cycle just kept repeating. As long as the judge was alive the people would honor God but as soon as the judge died they would immediately go back to doing whatever it was that pleased them.

This story of Barak takes us to ***Judges 4-5*** which chronologically occurs before the time of Gideon. What is most interesting is that this story is really about 2 amazing women of faith (Deborah and Jael) and not so much about Barak at all. Oh sure he has an important part to play, but the heroics, in terms of faith, belong to these 2 women.

So I had to ask myself why the writer of Hebrews included a reference to Barak and not Deborah or Jael in the hall of faith. For weeks I have been puzzled by this question. Finally, in order to get some clarity, I had to step back from the passage and remember why this letter was written. The “why” was the key to unlocking the mystery of Barak and enhancing my understanding of the “Hall of Faith.”

If you remember, the believing Jews to which this letter is addressed were on the verge of walking away from Christianity or at least making a significant swerve back into Judaism as a way to stop the intense persecution they were enduring at the hands of the Jews. Their suffering was intolerable and they were about to give-in and just quit. So this entire letter has been dealing with the reasons why there is no turning back to a system that is not just dead (because of the cross) but was soon to be entirely wiped out by the Romans.

So let’s think about it another way. These believers were failing; their faith was faltering, and they needed to know that their God not just loved them and forgave them but fully accepted them despite their failings. They needed to know how God truly saw them. So the Lord gave them example after example of “great heroes” whose stories were wrapped in shameful failure so they could know that their failure has not altered God’s desire for them. They just needed to repent, or stop what they were doing and walk the other way, for they were already considered, in His eyes, to be great heroes of faith.

You see, if this letter would have just focused on correction, they would have probably behaved just like you and me and lived in their failure instead of in the glory of God’s great mercy and grace. They would likely have been afraid of Him expecting Him to be mad and to judge them, which is why **Chapter 10** was all

about our having not just the courage but the right to enter into the presence of God anytime we want regardless of our “sinful” condition.

It is also why the author spent so much time (**Chapters 4-9**) talking about how much greater the priesthood of Christ is compared to the priesthood of Judaism for Jesus got the job done for real once and for all. We are forgiven, we are clean, we are accepted, He does not deal with us on the basis of sin, and He is our great advocate who appears before the Father always making intercession on our behalf **so we don't have to live in the shame of failure nor the fear of failure.**

Accordingly, the hall of faith is all about giving you and me hope. In each of the stories, in **Chapter 11**, there has been one consistent theme: man's failure and God's faithfulness to honor even the slightest act of faith. And this story is no exception. Like Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Gideon, Barak was not, in and of himself, mighty in faith. But he is honored because in his failure God was faithful and so Barak could still do what the Lord needed him to do. You see the great “Hall of Faith” is really one big story of God's faithfulness in the midst of man's faithlessness.

In this story, the great acts of faith came through the deeds of 2 phenomenal women (Deborah and Jael) whose faith was strong, active and unwavering like the faith of Rahab before them. In fact, Barak kind of gets lost in the story, for these two women cast one big shadow over him as they of are the bookends of faith surrounding Barak enabling him to stand and fight.

The cast of characters for the story tonight are as follows:

- Jabin: King of Hazor in Canaan; a tyrant;
- Sisera: captain of Jabin's army;

- Deborah: a Jewish judge; a woman of faith and courage;
- Barak: a reluctant Jewish general;
- Heber: a Midianite who lives in Israel but is at peace with Jabin;
- Jael: the wife of Heber; an opportunist and a woman of faith;
- Jehovah God: in charge of all things including wars and weather.

Now let's dive into the story:

Judges 4:1-3

After Ehud's death, the Israelites again did evil in the Lord's sight. So the Lord turned them over to King Jabin of Hazor, a Canaanite king. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-haggoyim. Sisera, who had 900 iron chariots, ruthlessly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years. Then the people of Israel cried out to the Lord for help.

Now Ehud was a judge that God raised up to deliver the Israelites from the evil Moabites. His story starts off in ***Judges 3*** and has the ever so familiar tagline from the book of Judges: "Once again the Israelites did what was evil in the Lord's sight." We're not sure how long he was a judge but he as soon as he died things went right back to "normal" where the Israelites again did evil in the Lord's sight.

So God raised up Jabin to oppress the Israelites; but that is pretty much all the press that Jabin gets as this story centers around Sisera, Jabin's general, who was stationed just north of the sea of Galilee. This man ruthlessly oppressed the

Israelites and it was his advanced technology which enabled him to have a complete advantage over the Israelites in terms of warfare.

These 900 chariots of iron were the key to the Canaanite's superiority. In terms of warfare, the chariot was akin to our modern tank; and, if you remember, it was the Canaanites who first introduced them to Egypt when the Hyskos lived in the land of Egypt around the time that Moses was born. It should be noted that the Israelites did not own any chariots at this time, much less iron ones. They did not get chariots until the time of the monarchy under King Saul.

The chariots were pulled by 2 horses and could hold 2 to 3 warriors and they gave quite an advantage on flat ground for speed and rapid flanking of the enemy. The Canaanites were known for their metal work and at this time iron was the new technology replacing bronze. Iron was much stronger than bronze and it protected both the axel of the chariot and provided a more solid base and structure for the soldiers to stand on and fight.

Now clearly the chariots would only be good on open pasture land (like the vast plane of Megiddo where Gideon fought his battle against the Midianites), but would be worthless in most of the other territory in Israel which was hilly and quite rocky. This is an important fact for this story.

We also find out from the poem in ***Judges 5:8*** that the Israelites had been almost entirely stripped of their own fighting gear, presumably by Sisera, which made it possible for him to oppress them so ruthlessly. It says, "Yet not a shield or spear could be seen among forty thousand warriors in Israel!"

Now we don't really know that much about Sisera except for silly legends For example, it is said that his voice was so strong that when he called loudly the

most solid wall would shake and the wildest animal would fall dead. Once it is said that he caught fish enough in his beard when he was bathing in the Kishon River to provision his who army. And the story is told that 31 kings followed Sisera merely for the opportunity of drinking or using the waters of Israel which he had used. So he had quite a famed reputation as a mighty man but he was also very cruel. Again, he ruthlessly oppressed the Israelites for 20-years.

Then the people of Israel finally cried out to the Lord for help. This pattern is so sad. They turn their backs on the Lord and then when He brings judgment into their lives they just take it and take it and take it until finally the strain of it all is too much to bear and then they suddenly cry out for help. They don't cry out to repent of their sins; in fact they really have no sorrow for their sins. They don't even mention them. They just want their suffering to stop; so when they run out of options they once again ask the Lord for help.

Again, this is a picture of God's faithfulness in the midst of our ridiculous insensitivity even to the very base aspects of our relationship with God. All I can say is that He is amazing and I have no idea why He puts up with us, but I am so thankful that He does.

Judges 4:4-7

Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, was a prophet who was judging Israel at that time. She would sit under the Palm of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites would go to her for judgment. One day she sent for Barak son of Abinoam, who lived in Kedesh in the land of Naphtali. She said to him, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, commands

you: Call out 10,000 warriors from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun at Mount Tabor. And I will call out Sisera, commander of Jabin's army, along with his chariots and warriors, to the Kishon River. There I will give you victory over him."

God's humor and sarcasm is so pointed. The idea here is that they had so turned their backs to the Lord that there was no man that could properly lead the nation of Israel, so the country had to be led by a woman. Now, in our day and age that is not really a problem, but in the Middle East, both now and in ancient times, this would have been a huge embarrassment.

In effect God is saying that they were all just a bunch of babies who still need a mother to nurse them so He raised up for them a mother—a queen bee so to speak (Deborah actually means "bee")—because spiritually they were just a bunch of babies.

Now Deborah was so much more than a prophet, she ruled this land. They not only would come to her for judgment but she also had authority to command the army. When she summoned Barak, he came. Without question she was in charge.

Now I want you to look at this map. Deborah was in the hill country of Ephraim which was a little bit North West of the Dead Sea whereas Barak (whose name means "lightening") was up in the land of Naphtali which was to the west of the Sea of Galilee. I want you to take note of the fact that she met in the hill country which provided her some natural protection from Sisera since his chariots could not really advance on her position.

So Barak comes and she gives him the word of the Lord: "Call out 10,000 warriors from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun at Mount Tabor. And I will call out Sisera, commander of Jabin's army, along with his chariots and warriors, to the Kishon River. There I will give you victory over him."

Looking at this next map you can begin to understand the Lord's battle strategy. They are to gather at Mount Tabor which gives a natural elevation advantage and viewing vantage point over the enemy who would have to come down along this flat ravine next to the river Kishon. I have included a couple of pictures so you can appreciate how steep of a descent there was from the mountain top which provided the obvious military advantage. Mount Tabor is also the mountain known in the New Testament as the Mount of Transfiguration where Jesus showed Peter, James and John a glimpse of His glory.

Now it is believed that this was the dry months for the flats near the river were subject to terrible flooding during the rainy season and there would be no way the chariots would have been able to advance during the rainy season.

So the Lord promised Barak that if he gathers his army, the Lord will place the victory into his hands. God would give him the mighty Sisera along with all his chariots and warriors. All Barak had to do was his simple part and God would do the rest. But remember, Barak, this "commander," was really just a baby.

Judges 4:8

Barak told her, "I will go, but only if you go with me."

It was not enough to receive this amazing word from the Lord, he wanted Deborah there as his good luck charm. Barak wanted to leverage her faith in God since it is clear that his was lacking. He probably also wanted to leverage her leadership to gather together the army of 10,000 since they were probably too afraid to go to war against Sisera. Barak must have thought he needed her “moxy” to successfully gather together the troops. But for whatever reason he refused to go without her despite what the Lord had commanded.

Judges 4:9

Very well," she replied, "I will go with you. But you will receive no honor in this venture, for the Lord's victory over Sisera will be at the hands of a woman."

The men were mere babies, so the women would rule this day. Now this passage has a double meaning. Not only would Deborah receive the glory, but this also prophetically points forward to the role that Jael would have in this victory—another woman who decisively determined the outcome of this battle.

Judges 4:9-11

So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. At Kedesh, Barak called together the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali, and 10,000 warriors went up with him. Deborah also went with him. Now Heber the Kenite, a descendant of Moses' brother-in-law Hobab, had moved away from the other members of his tribe and pitched his tent by the oak of Zaananim near Kedesh.

On our map we can see that Kedesh is near the South West corner of the Sea of Galilee. This is where all the troops met before they went up to Mount Tabor. Now we found out from **Chapter 5:8** that the weapons and shields were very scarce, so for Deborah and Barak to go to war was a great act of faith. Sure, Barak rode the back of Deborah's faith, but still he went; he still made the choice to bet his life on the Word of God and for that he is honored in Hebrews.

Now, we get an introduction to this man named Heber who was a descendant of Moses' brother in law Hobab. In **Numbers 10:29** we find that Moses invited Hobab to live in the land and promised that he would be cared for and treated well. For whatever reason Heber moved away from his family and settled just south of Kedesh close to where the army had initially gathered.

Now being Moses brother in law and the fact that he was living in the land we would assume that he would have been an ally with Israel. But that does not seem to be the case. We are told in **4:17** that Heber was on friendly terms with King Jabin. So it seems that Heber was playing both sides or, better said, he was probably trying to be neutral and be friendly with everyone just as long as they left him alone and let him live peacefully in the land. It is likely that he was more of an opportunist making sure he did not get caught in the middle. This tid-bit about Heber is the set up for the big finale which occurs in his home.

Judges 4:12-16

When Sisera was told that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, he called for all 900 of his iron chariots and all of his warriors, and they

marched from Harosheth-haggoyim to the Kishon River.

Then Deborah said to Barak, "Get ready! This is the day the Lord will give you victory over Sisera, for the Lord is marching ahead of you." So Barak led his 10,000 warriors down the slopes of Mount Tabor into battle.

When Barak attacked, the Lord threw Sisera and all his chariots and warriors into a panic. Sisera leaped down from his chariot and escaped on foot. Then Barak chased the chariots and the enemy army all the way to Harosheth-haggoyim, killing all of Sisera's warriors. Not a single one was left alive.

Now a lot happened here. Somehow Sisera found out that the Israelites had gathered for war. So he gathered all his troops and came from where he was positioned on the far western end of the country where the tribes of Asher, Zebulun and Manasseh all meet and marched toward Tabor.

Bringing all of his troops and his chariots seems to be in character for Sisera. As we learned, he was a ruthless man and he was intent on crushing or demolishing what he thought was a pathetic little rebellion. Surely, bringing all his forces was a bit overkill for this under provisioned army that was led by a woman. But we have to remember that the biggest player in this drama is the Lord. The Lord put it into Sisera's heart (for the Lord called him out) so that his cruel reign would be ended.

To me this is so powerful. It is so easy to be caught off guard by our circumstances and forget that **our God is the Lord God**. This means that He is sovereign over the affairs of mankind—period! Even the enemy who had no relationship with our God has to obey when the Lord calls. As King Nebuchadnezzar learned and professed in ***Daniel 4:34-35***:

His rule is everlasting and His kingdom is eternal. All the people of the earth are nothing compared to Him. He has the power to do as He pleases among the angels of heaven and with those who live on the earth. No one can stop Him or challenge Him, saying, "What do you mean by doing these things.

Remember this truth. **Our God is the Lord God!** There is none like Him. No one compares. And He is not the god of most of our ancestors who is an impotent god who seems to be asleep at the wheel. No, He is the Lord God who is sovereign over the affairs of men.

So He called and Sisera obeyed. Sisera garnished his forces and traveled east following the path of the Kishon River heading toward the plains which were before Mount Tabor. This must have been an impressive force of arms and quite intimidating. Thus, Deborah steps up and imparts her faith and courage to Barak. She reminds him that the Lord is marching ahead of him and it is the Lord who will provide the victory. So Barak mustered up his courage and headed down the slopes of Mount Tabor into battle.

Now to understand what happens next we have to get our understanding from **Chapter 5** and from the history of the day. Being a Canaanite, Sisera's god would have been Baal who was considered to be the sovereign god of the land who had absolute control over both nature and man. Baal was in control of the weather and determined when it rained and when it was dry. Even the thunder was believed to be the shouts of Baal (which is why it is so ironic that Barak means lightening. The thunder is just noise, but the power is in the lightening).

Now, when Barak attacked, Sisera and all his mighty army freaked out and they ran away on foot. What in the world would have caused this mighty man, who could catch enough fish in his beard, merely by bathing, to feed his whole army, to turn and run away like a baby?

Judges 5:3-5

Listen, you kings! Pay attention, you mighty rulers! For I will sing to the Lord. I will make music to the Lord, the God of Israel. "Lord, when you set out from Seir and marched across the fields of Edom, the earth trembled, and the cloudy skies poured down rain. The mountains quaked in the presence of the Lord, the God of Mount Sinai—in the presence of the Lord, the God of Israel.

Let's get this picture clearly in mind. Sisera and his entire army are confidently marching down this flood plain next to the Kishon River during the dry season and all of a sudden there comes a mighty rain and a flash flood that just decimates the army and carries them away. We know this because **Judges 5:21** says, "The Kishon River swept them away— that ancient torrent, the Kishon."

So God lures Sisera into a trap by gathering the Israelites on Mount Tabor and Sisera takes the bait. Then God proves that Baal is nothing and He is everything and He sends the rain and the torrential flash-flood which would nullify Sisera's tactical advantage in war. The chariots are worthless in the mud and the Israelites have the high ground coming down on the slopes of Tabor; so Sisera's army was like sitting ducks. He must have thought that Baal had abandoned him and was

not going before him in this war, so he panicked jumped from his chariot and ran like a baby.

In addition, we know that the Angel of the Lord went out before Barak and it was the Lord that threw Sisera's army into a panic, which was exactly what Barak needed. They chased the Canaanites all the way back to where they began and killed every single one of them; not a single one was left alive.

Now there was more to this war than meets the eye. Behind the scenes of every human drama is an unseen spiritual drama. Behind every war is an unseen war in the heavens. **Judges 5:20** says, "The stars fought from heaven. The stars in their orbits fought against Sisera." Biblically, the stars, in this kind of reference, refer to the angels in the heavenly realms. So the good angels who were protecting Israel were fighting the bad demonic angels who had gone before Sisera and the good angels won.

Now, as a body we are not unfamiliar with the need for angelic assistance to fight our spiritual battles, but I want us to be aware that this battle is always ensuing over our lives as well as over our schools, our cities, our states, our nations, etc. It is happening all around us.

As for our part, we may have to engage physically in some of these struggles, but God also elicits us to engage spiritually and that is where prayer comes in. For some reason, which we do not really understand, it is our prayers that often seem to determine the outcome in some of these battles. And that is why what we do on Thursday nights and what the Watchmen do on Tuesday nights is critical to our spiritual survival as a body. The war we are in has been brutal, but we have found victory in large part through our prayer.

Let's continue with the final part, or the other bookend, in this story.

Judges 4:17-21

Meanwhile, Sisera ran to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because Heber's family was on friendly terms with King Jabin of Hazor. Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Come into my tent, sir. Come in. Don't be afraid." So he went into her tent, and she covered him with a blanket. "Please give me some water," he said. "I'm thirsty." So she gave him some milk from a leather bag and covered him again.

"Stand at the door of the tent," he told her. "If anybody comes and asks you if there is anyone here, say no." But when Sisera fell asleep from exhaustion, Jael quietly crept up to him with a hammer and tent peg in her hand. Then she drove the tent peg through his temple and into the ground, and so he died.

So Sisera abandons his army and runs east going with the flow of the river. He runs for about 6-miles until he finds himself just south of Kadesh at the tent of his friend Heber. Jael was a pretty foxy woman in that she ran out to meet Sisera and invited him into her tent.

First of all you have to know that a man would never enter into a tent of a woman in those days. The women were responsible for setting up the tent and they always had their own room or section and a man must be invited in—even her husband. No one, and I mean no one, would just barge into a woman's room. So she goes out to him assuming that if he was on the run that the Israelites must

have been victorious and she already knew what she was going to do. She was going to earn the favor and blessing of the Israelites and their God since the power of King Jabin (Sisera) was all but terminated.

She tells him not to be afraid and he believes that he had found a place of safety. He really expects that he will just hide in there and then walk on home when the battle is finished. Some brave man; he would not even fight it out with his troops. He just runs and has no problem hiding in the tent of a woman.

Sisera is exhausted and she gives him milk instead of water probably because the warm milk (which was sitting in a leather bag) would make him sleepy where as the water might revive him. So she covered him, but before he falls asleep he makes the fatal mistake of asking Jael to lie if anyone came looking for him.

If Jael had any doubt about the outcome of the battle it was now all settled in her mind. The Jews had won the battle which meant that the Canaanite grip on the land was broken. She knew that if she protected Sisera that she would face retribution by the Jews who would not stop their search until they knew that Sisera was dead. However, if she killed him she would be a full-fledged hero. In addition, she believed that God would bless her for protecting his people. Jael knew that the God of the Jews was the God of the land and Baal was nothing.

So there lies Sisera in the chamber of Jael. He was just a baby, who was nursed by a woman, given some milk, tucked into bed and put to sleep, feeling all comfy and safe in his mother's room. Again, God mocks Sisera using the same analogy by which he mocked the Israelites.

After all, Sisera had no reason to fear Jael. She was a friend. No soldier would barge into her bedroom; he was safe. But Jael was not just foxy, like Deborah she

was a woman of action. She was not going to just stand there and let this play out; she was going to ensure how it would play out.

Earlier, I said that the women were the ones who set up the tents in those days, so Jael knew how to handle a hammer and tent peg. She put it right next to his head and the rest was history.

Judges 5:24-27

Most blessed among women is Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. May she be blessed above all women who live in tents. Sisera asked for water, and she gave him milk. In a bowl fit for nobles, she brought him yogurt. Then with her left hand she reached for a tent peg, and with her right hand for the workman's hammer. She struck Sisera with the hammer, crushing his head. With a shattering blow, she pierced his temples. He sank, he fell, he lay still at her feet. And where he sank, there he died.

That is so intense. Just as the Lord promised, the glory and the ultimate victory was from the hand of a woman; and a gentile at that. She was a Midianite and not a Jew. So salvation for the Jews came at the hand of a gentile woman. Does that ring "typology" in anyone's ears?

Romans **Chapter 9-11** makes it clear that God will use the Gentile Bride of Christ to provoke the Jews to jealousy causing a small remnant to return to the living God and find salvation not through their works but in Jesus Christ through His amazing grace. Our choosing to live by faith will be the death blow to the

enemy and the very source of the Jews jealousy leading to their subsequent salvation. It's pretty cool typology.

The mind of the enemy has always surprised me. They know that God is more powerful, but I guess they have been so used to having victory over believers that they always expect that they are going to win. So God kind of gives us a picture of this and then mocks the enemy for his arrogance.

Judges 5:28-30

From the window Sisera's mother looked out. Through the window she watched for his return, saying, "Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why don't we hear the sound of chariot wheels?" Her wise women answer, and she repeats these words to herself: "They must be dividing the captured plunder— with a woman or two for every man. There will be colorful robes for Sisera, and colorful, embroidered robes for me. Yes, the plunder will include colorful robes embroidered on both sides."

Can you imagine; "There will be colorful, embroidered robes for me." Sorry, he is dead and there is nothing for you but sorrow and great mourning. For the Lord to use this example of his Mother completes the analogy He has used all along, but it is all just so raw, intense and deeply personal.

In addition, the image of a woman watching at a window was God's way of putting the final seal or capstone on this story that would have brought fear into the hearts of all Canaanites. Clay statues dug up at the archaeological site of

Ugarit show a woman's face looking out from a lattice window and it is believed that this was a common way to portray the goddess in Canaanite religion.

Therefore, placing Sisera's mother at a latticed window linked her with the Canaanite goddesses. The message: She is the mother of something that is already dead even though she does not realize it. Even the wisest of the princesses around her, the priestesses of the goddess, do not realize the truth.

The passage therefore implies that the Canaanite religion is dead, though its followers have not yet realized the fact. And sticking with the typology, it also implies that the Satan is already conquered even though his follows have not yet realized this fact. Again, this confirms for us that there will be no sanctuary for the enemy. We win, he loses and all those who have loved the enemy will be left with nothing but sorrow and great mourning.

Judges 4:22

When Barak came looking for Sisera, Jael went out to meet him. She said, "Come, and I will show you the man you are looking for." So he followed her into the tent and found Sisera lying there dead, with the tent peg through his temple.

Now, in closing, I want to comment on something. Barak could have dealt the final death blow. It could have been his sword that ended the life of Sisera. Barak could have been the great hero; but instead the glory and the honor were given by God to two women whose active belief proved their great faith. Barak got to

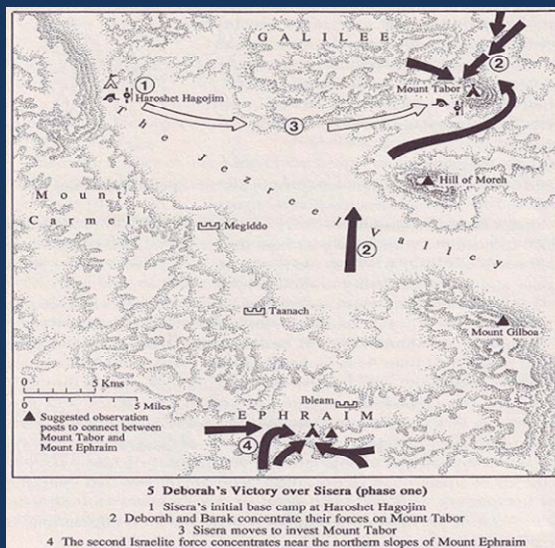
see what they did, but he lost the opportunity for the glory. Nevertheless, Barak is included in the great Hall of Faith because God was still faithful even in Barak's faltering and God used him to deliver Israel.

Remember, God's purposes will not be thwarted; He will always accomplish His goal. However, we get to decide if we are going to be a part of it or not. Are we going to doubt and act like a baby in our faith who just needs to be mothered or are we going to be like these two women and act out of our great faith? You get to decide!

Let's Pray.



The Battle Strategy

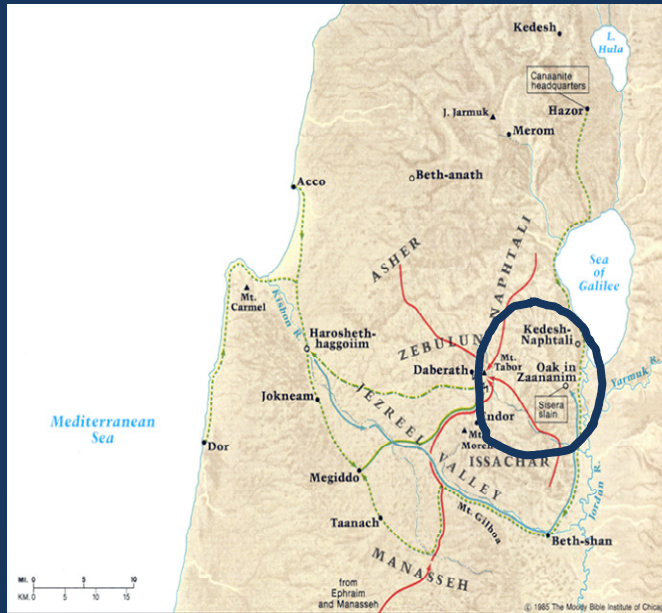


Mount Tabor



Mount Tabor





The Battle

