

Judges Chapters 4-5- John Karmelich

1. Ever have moments of doubts that God can't use me to make a difference for Him? All of us feel that way at times. One of the things we must constantly remind ourselves is of the fact that God's God and it's up to Him to choose who He's going to use and how He's going to use them. I bring this up because these two chapters describe very unlikely heroes. Ordinary folks who God uses to make a difference in the world around them. My point is we don't have to be great leaders or powerful people to be used by God. We just have to be willing to submit our lives to Him and be willing to have the boldness to go forth and make a difference for Him. These two chapters got a whole bunch of unlikely heroes and villains that nobody would ever care about. They're here as a reminder that God can use anyone willing to make that difference. While you are pondering how He could possibly use you, let me list all the players in this little drama that unfolds here in these two chapters. Ever read a book that opens with a list of the characters and their roles? That's what is needed here as there are a lot of people to keep track of in this story. Here we go:
2. The following is the cast of characters in these two chapters (in alphabetical order):
 - a) Barak: An Israelite who would lead 10,000 men to a victory over Israel's enemies. Those 10,000 were from two of the 12 tribes of Israel. He was not a judge but appointed by the judge at that time (Deborah). Barak said he'd only do it if Deborah went with him. She said she'd go along, but because Barak refused to trust in God's instructions by himself, that Barak wouldn't get the glory for himself! Barak did lead that army as commanded and wiped out Sisera's (the leader of the opposition) army. (Don't get this Barak confused with another foreign king named Barak named in the book of Numbers, no relation.)
 - b) Deborah: A prophetess. That's someone in the bible given the power to receive messages from God. She became the next judge in Israel. Not all judges had the power of a prophet but this woman did. Because of that gift, the Israelites made her their "judge".
 - c) Ehud: The prophet mentioned in the end of the last chapter. He's now "dead" in Verse 1.
 - d) Israelites: The nation turned from God once Ehud was dead and they're in trouble again.
 - e) Heber: The husband of Jael. He has no part in this story, but his name is mentioned.
 - f) Jael: A woman of a foreign nation living in Israel. She and her husband were "neutral" in the battle between the Israelites and the "Canaanites" (The group God called the Israelites to completely destroy.) However, because she was living in Israel and saw that they were winning the war against the Canannites, God used her to kill their military leader!
 - g) Jabin: A foreign king ruling in Israel that the Israelites were called to wipe out. He's now reigning over Israel from a city called Hazor. He'll be dead by the end of these chapters!
 - h) Sisera: Jabin's military leader. The "power behind the throne". He controlled 900 chariots (the ancient version of a tank) and was wrecking havoc with those "tanks" in Israel. This is the guy who will be killed by the "neutral" woman in the story (Jael).
3. The good news is you don't have to memorize this list. I just wanted to posted this list as if you're reading this story for the first (or twentieth) time, it's confusing to keep all the names straight. It's a reference list so if you get confused "who is who", here is a reference guide.
4. With that said, here's the story: Deborah was the latest judge ruling over the Israelites. A foreign king (Jabin) was oppressing the Israelites and the enforcer was his general. He's enforcing that dominance with lots of four-wheeled chariots. To end this, Deborah asked a man named Barak who apparently was thought of as a leader in the tribes among the tribes in the northern part of Israel to lead God's rebellion against those foreigners.
 - a) A key point of the battle is God's going to cause it to rain, which will make the chariots an ineffective weapon as their wheels will get stuck in the mud! That gives the Israelites that big victory and the foreigners are routed.
 - b) Barak requested that Deborah join him in that battle. Because it wasn't God's will for her to be a part of that battle, she tells Barak "you won't have all the glory for yourself".

- c) The final part of the story involves the other woman in this story (the neutral party in that war between the Canaanites and the Israelites). The short version is she kills that general in her tent.
 - d) Therefore, this war is over and the Israelites are once again ruling over their own land. All of this story is essentially told in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 is a song celebrating the victory as well as a praise to God for giving them that victory. Many of the details of this story we'll get from the Chapter 5 "praise song" as opposed to the Chapter 4 story itself.
5. OK then, time to exhale and breath. This would all be interesting if we happened to be living in Israel thousands of years ago. Besides the fact it's in the bible, why should I care about all of this? It gives me great pleasure to answer that question. First it follows the theme of Judges, which is all about what happens when we trust in God's guidance and how He blesses us when if let Him guide our lives. It also shows the price one pays when one turns from God! The Israelites were a part of a life and death struggle in these chapters. We're also called to be part of a "life and death" struggle. Let me explain: Being saved means that God calls us to use our lives as a living witness for Him. Eternal lives are at stake. At any given moment in our life, we're part of the problem or part of the solution. No it doesn't mean we have to kill people. It means we have to use our lives as a witness for Jesus as we interact in the world around us.
- a) That's a nice speech John and figure we pretty much believe that. What does it specifically have to do with this story? This story reminds us that in the worst of circumstances and in spite of the fact we may have turned from God, He still desires to work through us so He can be glorified by our lives. In this story God uses ordinary people to overthrow a nation with better weapons. It's a reminder that God's always in charge and He can maneuver a situation however He wants for His glory.
 - b) It's not about the size of the miracle we may get in our lives. It's about the fact He's called us to be a witness for Him and use our lives for His glory. It's usually in hindsight that we see how He's worked out any situation for His glory as is the case here!
 - c) Of all things, all of this leads to my lesson title, "Stepping up to the plate for God". For my non-American readers the "plate" is a baseball reference. To swing at the ball in baseball, a necessary first step is to step "up to the plate" to swing at the ball. The point is if we desire to be used by God to make a difference for Him, we must have the boldness to want to go make that difference in the first place! These two chapters are full of stories of people who did step up to the plate those who didn't and those who compromised with what God did call them to do. The great lesson in these chapters is about the rewards we get in this life when we "step up to the plate for God" and the blessings we lose in this life when we will not "step up to the plate". With that said, let me discuss Chapter 5 quickly:
 - d) In Chapter 5, it is in effect a "Praise fest"? Why is it here? Besides giving us more details about how God worked, what's the purpose? If the book of Judges is all about how the Israelites disobeyed Him, why have a chapter dedicated to praising Him? To show us the benefits of "stepping up to the plate" for God and the consequences of failing to do so. The issue here isn't salvation, it's what we're doing with it! God not only wants us to be saved, He wants to use our lives to make a difference for Him. Yes I will get into the "how we do that" in this lesson, but first we must realize it begins with a desire to be used by God as to make that difference for Him and we pray for the boldness to do so.
6. With that said, let's study this story and learn from these characters how God desires how we can be a witness for Him in our lives. That's what we were created for in the first place!
7. Chapter 4, Verse 1: After Ehud died, the Israelites once again did evil in the eyes of the LORD.
- a) One of the great questions of the bible is why would a people collectively turn from God? The answer is temptation is well, tempting! It's easy to see what's in front of us and it's not as easy to keep trusting in a God we can't see or sense in anyway! Let's remember why the local gods were tempting! The short version is it appealed to the wallet, it appealed to get power and it appealed to cheap sex. No wonder the Israelites were slipping here!

- b) The longer version is the local deity was a god of the weather. To honor this good meant a good crop growth and well, more money. The female goddess that was there as well was turned on by sexual activity. Besides all of that, the Canaanites had technology that's not available to the Israelites. They had iron chariots as we'll read soon enough. Israelites were still in the "bronze" age. Bottom line, the visual of seeing how much better the locals had it tempted the Israelites to turn from God.
 - c) Before we "poo poo" them, think how easy it is for us to turn from God. It doesn't matter how long we've been Christians. Temptation is always there. It was for them at this time, as it is for us living today. OK then, Verse 2:
8. Verse 2: So the LORD sold them into the hands of Jabin, a king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth Haggoyim. ³ Because he had nine hundred iron chariots and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the LORD for help.
- a) Time for a quick "who and where" lesson. There are two enemies listed here: The king and the chief general doing the damage. The king reigned from Hazor. It's north of the Sea of Galilee and today it's an archeological "dig site".
 - b) The underlying point is God allowed all of this to occur in order to get His people to focus back on Him. OK, time for the big question: If God just wanted their attention, why not a big "message in the sky" to worship God? Because God wants us to come to Him based on a love relationship, not one of fear or intimidation. Causing trouble is God's way of saying "Talk to Me, I want to help, I haven't heard from you in awhile!" I'm not saying that all of our problems are God ordained. However, they're all "God allowed" and God uses them to draw us close to Him as He's doing here.
 - c) Again, the "locals" had technology the Israelites didn't have. Iron chariots were the "tank" of that generation. Israelite weapons couldn't stop them. I don't know if the chariots had numbers on the side of them, but I suspect it got well known just how many of them there were at that time! I picture the Canaanite tanks working their way around the main roads and causing havoc "just because they could". Yes Israelites got killed and I suspect many of the women were raped, killed or sold for slavery! Bottom line, this is bad news for the "home team". Yes someone is needed to step up to the plate here, which is a big clue!
 - d) The positive news is the Israelites did cry out to God for help! So why did God allow this to go on for twenty years? I suspect part of it was God saying, "You want to live like them go ahead for awhile and watch what happens!" When we Christians start to live like those who don't believe Jesus is in charge of our lives, we may not suffer immediately, but God will do what He has to do to draw us back to Him and that's what we see here.
 - e) OK, time to introduce some of the hero's of this story:
9. Verse 4: Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. ⁵ She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided. ⁶ She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead the way to Mount Tabor. ⁷ I will lure Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.' "
- a) OK time to go back to our list of characters. The two main ones are a prophetess named Deborah and the military leader (so to speak) of the Israelites named Jabin.
 - b) The name Deborah means "bee". I could give you a whole lecture on how productive bees are and the gifts God gives them. It's best to say Deborah was "well named" as she works behind the scenes to trust God and He uses her to deliver messages to the Israelites.
 - c) Notice she has a "double role". She gets messages from God so she's a prophet. There are a number of female prophets in the Old and New Testament. The short version is it is a person used by God to deliver a message from Him to God's people.

- d) OK so are there prophets today? In the formal sense of messages to all of Israel, it came to an end with John the Baptist (Luke 16:16). I'm positive God inspires many people to speak on His behalf, but that's different. When someone says to me God's got a message for me that they're delivering, my first thought is "what, has God lost my phone number?" Then I see if their message lines up with scripture. Finally I always take predictions with a grain of salt in the sense I see if it comes true and what message is being preached with it!
 - e) Anyway, there were women who God picked for those roles as well as men!
 - f) Besides being a prophet, she was a "judge" back then. That just meant the Israelites looked to her for guidance as to what to do. Let's face it enemies were wrecking havoc! They had to be thinking, "Wait a minute there's that Deborah lady who at times gets messages from God, let's see what she says we should do here! (That's how I picture it anyway!) Besides that, the text says because she had "Godly wisdom" she used part of her time to settle any disputes that people had. In that sense, she was a "traditional" judge in Israel.
 - g) Now its time to describe the other "semi-hero" in this story. A man named Barak. Back in the book of judges there was a foreign king named Barak. No relation. I don't know if this Barak was already a military leader or just someone who could "rally the troops". All we know is the Israelites were "subject" to those chariots, so I doubt he had much of an army at that point. Probably just a bunch of people with farm tools.
 - h) The important thing is God "commanded" Barak to lead an army. If there's one thing I've learned as a Christian is God never commands what He doesn't enable us to complete! My point is if God gave this order, He's going to make it possible for the Israelites to win!
 - i) One of the things one learns from reading this story is that we get a lot of the details from the "praise song" that is in Chapter 5. I'm going to tell you things about this battle and the reason I know them is simply because Chapter 5 "says it's so". One of them is the fact that chariots are only good on dry ground. In other words the wheels get stuck in the mud. In Chapter 5 we'll learn that God causes a major rainstorm to occur most likely in a time of the year when rain doesn't occur. The reason the Israelites will win this battle against this army with superior weapons is their weapons will become useless in a mud storm!
 - j) Meanwhile, I'm jumping ahead of the story. At this point Barak has to go raise an army. I suspect he's traveling around the area with a bugle saying, "Hey, anybody tired of being a slave to the Canaanites and want to follow God? Well, guess what God wants me to do!" I am willing to bet a lot of people were willing to join that army knowing that God Himself gave a command for Barak to lead the Israelites to victory!
 - k) The other point in this story is the foreign general will meet that army at the specific place that Deborah was told by God. I suspect the foreign general thought, here's my big chance to wipe out any rebellion against the Israelites as I've got the superior weapons!
 - l) Anyway, the plan is in motion. God even spoke through Deborah to give the location for this battle to take place.
 - m) OK, before we move on in the story, time for a "why should I care" moment: After all God doesn't give us verbal orders this way. God calls on us to be a good witness for Him. It's a matter of when we're called to "step up to the plate", we should do as ordered. None of us know how and when God will use us to make a difference for Him. All we can do is do our best to be a good witness for Him and use the gifts He's given us to do so. After that obvious little lecture, it's time to read how Barak "failed to fully step up to the plate":
10. Verse 8: Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go."
- a) Now there's a lack of faith. God established Deborah as a prophet. God gave an order for Barak to lead this army to victory. Instead of jumping to start rallying the troops to do the thing God commanded, this guy said, "I'll only do this if you (Deborah) go with me. Was it a lack of faith? Did he think he needed Deborah's physical presence to encourage others to join him? We don't know. We do know that when "push came to shove", Barak said he wanted her to lead the army.

- b) The recurring theme in this book is the danger of thinking we can compromise with what God wants for our lives. As we're about to see, God will get his victory as that's what His people need, but Barak won't get all the glory for failing to "step up to the plate" himself!
11. Verse 9: "Very well," Deborah said, "I will go with you. But because of the way you are going about this, the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will hand Sisera over to a woman." So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh,¹⁰ where he summoned Zebulun and Naphtali. Ten thousand men followed him, and Deborah also went with him.
- a) Let me return to my "step up to the plate" theme. The positive news about the man God called to lead the Israelites is he agreed to raise the army and attack the foreign army with all those "tanks". The bad news is he failed to fully trust God to work through him. That's why Deborah says, "the honor will not be yours" and (another) woman will kill the leader of the opposition! The point for you and me is when God calls us to "step up to the plate" no matter what the role is (big or small), we can do it with boldness and use our lives as to make a difference for God or we can "compromise" and only do it "half way". The book of Judges unfortunately is full of stories of people who compromised with what God wanted them to do and Barak is just one of many examples we'll read in this book like that!
 - b) So how do I know when it's my turn to "step up to the plate"? As I was taught many years ago, with God, "it's always our move". What that means is it should be our desire to want to be used by Him. We should be willing to volunteer to make a difference for Him. The specifics are up to us. It can be something as simple as painting a church room and while we do that, pray for the people who will use that room for His glory. It can be any sort of role big or small that is making a difference for Him. The point is our willingness to make that difference and finding things we can do. When we make ourselves available, then is when God can use us. Meanwhile, back to the specific example of Deborah and Barak.
 - c) Time for a few facts to keep in mind: The country of Israel at that time was divided by the 12 tribes: Quick explanation for the newcomers: The first Jewish man was Abraham. His grandson had 12 sons through four different women. Those 12 boys ended up becoming the 12 tribes of Israel. At this point in history, most Israelites lived in the territory assigned to them by Joshua (tribe by tribe). Years later, Israelites would migrate to different areas, but the tribe boundaries still exist and even modern Israel knows those boundaries areas, even though modern Israelites have no idea what tribe their from.
 - i) It's important to story because apparently Barak only rounded up 10,000 from two of the 12 tribes. When we get to the "praise song" of Chapter 5, the other tribes get a "slap on the wrist" for not getting involved in the fight (as in not trusting God for victory over one's enemies).
 - ii) Bottom line is, "it's war time". Barak had 10,000 plus Deborah went with him. The enemy's numbers were not given, but they had superior weapons (i.e., the chariots which I call the ancient equivalent of the tank).
 - d) Time for a new wrinkle in the story and new characters:
12. Verse 11: Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law, and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaanannim near Kedesh.
- a) Ok, who's Heber the Kenite, and why should I care? Here's the back story: When Moses was leading the Israelites through the desert from Egypt to Israel, he invited his father-in-law as a guide. The Kenites were a nomadic tribe and knew the terrain well. Apparently when the Israelites settled in the Promised Land, many of the Kenites settled there as well since they're "family" to the Israelites. It's now roughly 100 years since Moses died. We've got a story of one of those Kenites who was living in Israel. The location of this great tree isn't significant. What's significant is it wasn't far from where the battle was going to take place between the Israelites and the Canaanites. For those who care about geography, it's in the Northern part of Israel, north of the Sea of Galilee. Anyway, this character's wife is going to be an integral part of the story coming up, so that's why we get this verse.

13. Verse 12: When they told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor,¹³ Sisera gathered together his nine hundred iron chariots and all the men with him, from Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River.
 - a) Meanwhile, the "war drums" are beating. The 10,00 men Barak had organized are (as if we care) marching east to face Sisera (the general of the foreign army). The text mentions the 900 chariots again, in case we forgot the number. Sisera also had fighting men besides the riders on the chariots. Anyway the two armies both got wind that the other side is not very far away and were approaching each other for battle. Sisera probably thought this is not going to be much of a battle, since he had better weapons. If nothing else, this is a big reminder that "odds are not relevant" if we're doing what God calls us to do.
14. Verse 14: Then Deborah said to Barak, "Go! This is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the LORD gone ahead of you?" So Barak went down Mount Tabor, followed by ten thousand men.¹⁵ At Barak's advance, the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera abandoned his chariot and fled on foot.¹⁶ But Barak pursued the chariots and army as far as Harosheth Haggoyim. All the troops of Sisera fell by the sword; not a man was left.
 - a) There's a key point to this story that we won't discover until we get to the "praise song" of the next chapter. That is, the battle occurred either during or right after a big rainstorm. It is important because chariot wheels don't work in the mud! What's logical to speculate is the battle took place during a time when rain was not part of the forecast. Since Sisera was a general, I'm guessing he would not have advanced the tanks if he even thought rain was an issue. Bottom line, the chariots were useless, and with that Sisera's troops were routed in this battle. Notice that all the troops were killed. It's a reminder that when God calls us to victory over an issue, He (as much as possible) wants us to wipe it out completely!
 - b) Ok let's pause to discuss our own battles. Obviously God doesn't call most of us to war. It is a metaphor to fight the temptations that keep us away from God! As I explained earlier, the local deities appealed to power, success and cheap sex. That's tempting to anyone. To live the Christian life in essence, is to not live like the "world" lives. That refers to living in a way, where God's judgment doesn't matter! Let's face it, if there was no judgment day, I would say that getting all the power, success, fame and illicit things would be fine. What God is teaching the Israelites and us Christians is that living His way is best way to live. It is a matter of denying the "temporary pleasures of this life", as God's way is far greater.
 - i) Yes we can never have 100% victory over sin by willpower. However, by trusting in God's Spirit to guide us we can have complete victory over such temptations, as emphasized by the fact that every last enemy soldier was killed!
 - ii) Also remember why God wanted all of them killed! They were trespassing on His land! God never ordered the Israelites to kill everybody, just the specific people in that land at that time.
 - c) Bottom line, big victory time! The only one's left is that general the foreign king himself!
15. Verse 17: Sisera, however, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there were friendly relations between Jabin king of Hazor and the clan of Heber the Kenite.
 - a) Meanwhile "General Sisera" was now fleeing for his life. He just watched his entire army wiped out and his chariots rendered useless. He happened to wander to the tent where the "neutral" Kenite woman lived.
 - b) Anyway, the general thought, I'd be safe hiding here as the Kenites are neutral in this war.
16. Verse 18: Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Come, my lord, come right in. Don't be afraid." So he entered her tent, and she put a covering over him.
 - a) Apparently the Kenite's wife had her own tent. We don't know why she had her own. It was probably customary at that time. Anyway, the key "plot twist" of the story, is this is the woman who would kill the general. It's God's way of telling Barak, you didn't want to trust me? Great, someone else will get the glory of wiping out the foreign king!

- b) Remember that General Sisera was running for his life. He was probably extremely tired and was happy even for a "neutral person" to hide him. She agreed to hide him within her tent and covered him up in case Israelite soldiers made the rounds looking for him.
17. Verse 19: "I'm thirsty," he said. "Please give me some water." She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up. ²⁰ "Stand in the doorway of the tent," he told her. "If someone comes by and asks you, 'Is anyone here?' say 'No.' "
- a) Whether it's true or not, Jael (the women in the tent) gave the general milk (actually this is a "cottage cheese" type of drink. I'm guessing she said, "I don't have any water, I'd have to go outside to get it, but I have a skin of milk on me. Will that do? Here was this tired man desperate for a drink and he took it.
- b) If you ever can't sleep, it is true that warm milk does do the trick! Personally, I avoid milk products for digestive reasons, but it is true that milk helps one sleep. Here was this tired general, thinking he's fairly safe from the people searching for him. He's being hid under blankets, and he's given warm milk to drink. My guess is he was out like a light!
18. Verse 21: But Jael, Heber's wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died.
- a) Keep a couple of things in mind as you think about this verse. Nomadic women were the one's who set up the tents. They had the strength to drive spikes in the ground. That also means she had some sort of hammer device and spikes handy for that purpose. I have no idea if the pounding woke the general up. I suspect he was out cold and she knew how to strike him to kill him quickly.
- b) So why did she do this if she was neutral? I suspect she heard the Israelite army had won the battle big time. Maybe she thought she could earn points with the winning side by this action. That's speculation. For whatever reason, she killed the general and that was that!
- c) Now comes the other big scene, where Barak discovers she did this!
19. Verse 22: Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. "Come," she said, "I will show you the man you're looking for." So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera with the tent peg through his temple--dead.
- a) Meanwhile Barak was probably excited from winning the battle and wiping out every last Cananite that fought with "General Sisera". Now Barak figured, it's time to find that head guy as he's been a problem for the Israelites for 20 years (Verses 2-3). Remember Deborah said that Barak wouldn't get the glory of killing the king. I don't know if Barak wanted to prove her wrong or just wipe this guy out, but he found out where he was, as Jael invited him into her tent to see the evidence!
- b) There is no mention of thanking her or scolding her. My guess is Deborah's words were now ringing in his ears about how a woman would get the glory here!
- c) Time for the summary "epilogue" verse of this chapter:
20. Verse 23: On that day God subdued Jabin, the Canaanite king, before the Israelites. ²⁴ And the hand of the Israelites grew stronger and stronger against Jabin, the Canaanite king, until they destroyed him.
- a) Let's face it with the Canaanite king's general and army wiped out, it was just a matter of time before this foreign king himself would be wiped out. I'm sure he had other soldiers besides the one's lost in that battle, but the Israelites smelled victory had wiped him out!
21. Chapter 5, Verse 1: On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song:
- a) Time for the next big question: Why have this song here? Yes we get the fact we'll learn a few more details about the story in the song. Yes we know that people remember songs a lot better than we do words to a story. Since Barak wasn't the "complete hero" here, why is it he'd be interested in this song? He knew he blew it by not completely trusting in God. I guess he's willing to sing about it. Not to embarrass himself as much as it's teaching us the danger of not "stepping up the plate" when God calls us to service!

22. Verse 2: "When the princes in Israel take the lead, when the people willingly offer themselves--praise the LORD!
- a) As most of you know, I'm endlessly fascinated by the "why" question: why is this verse here? Why did God want this to be part of the bible? A couple of thoughts:
 - i) The first is about encouragement. This song is going to "name names" of people who did good and people who did bad. It's God's way of saying, "He's watching and it doesn't pay to be on His naughty list!"
 - ii) The second is a simple thing: People remember songs better than text. By having a song people could sing, they could learn about who's praised and condemned. It is a reminder that God wants us to "step up to the plate". Having a song about the hero's and villains (even though the song is long gone), it's a reminder that we're to step up to the plate or suffer the consequences.
 - iii) I believe God loves obedience. It's not an ego thing on His part. It's the realization the best way to live our lives is by obedience. Therefore, when people do obey, it's worth praising God for it!
 - iv) Ever wonder why we sing in church? Again, it's not for God's ego. It is to remind us who's in charge of our lives and what we should do about it! Anyway, we will read an ancient praise song here based on such obedience.
23. Verse 3: "Hear this, you kings! Listen, you rulers! I will sing to the LORD, I will sing; I will make music to the LORD, the God of Israel.
- a) Remember who "ordained" this song. It was Deborah. She was considered the top person in Israel (the judge) at that time. All I'm saying is imagine if our top politician said here's a song that I'm singing to God. Not everyone may believe in God, but that act would make people at the least, out of curiosity listen to what is being said.
 - b) Again keep in mind that most of this song will fill in details about the battle just described in the last chapter.
 - c) Also notice the lack of credit given to Barak. Deborah wrote it and she's the one singing to God about the victory.
 - d) Other than maybe she felt like singing, what was Deborah's motivation to do this? Notice who the song is also "addressed" to. Deborah wants kings and rulers to hear it. Realize in that culture, a "city leader" was considered a king. A town leader is a ruler. It also maybe addressed to foreign leaders within earshot. The key message is "God's in charge, so deal with it". That's what's behind this song. OK, time for details.
24. Verse 4: "O LORD, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the land of Edom, the earth shook, the heavens poured, the clouds poured down water. ⁵ The mountains quaked before the LORD, the One of Sinai, before the LORD, the God of Israel.
- a) If one wants to praise God, it can help to start with ways we are positive God has worked in our lives. For us, it can be ways God has preserved us through some horrid time in our lives. For the Israelites in Deborah's day, it's the reality that God got the Israelites (I think it was about 2,000,000) out of Egypt and into the land of Israel. The mention of Seir and of the land of Edom was in effect the last "pit stop" before getting to Israel. Simply think of it as Deborah's way of praising God for bringing the Israelites to where they are now.
 - b) What's the deal with "clouds poured down water"? It may be about the fact that the rain on the land of Israel is "God ordained". Keep in mind the false god "Baal" was worshiped as the locals believed he controlled the weather. This may be Deborah's response to state that ultimately God provided the rain and no one else.
 - i) Could the water also be an illusion to the rain that changed the course of the battle as described in the last chapter? Yes, and we'll get to that.
 - c) The reference to Sinai, the mountain in the desert where God gave the 10 Commandments were given is a way of saying the same God who gave us a set of laws to live by is also the same God who just gave us victory. The point is God's still guiding us then and now!

25. Verse 6: "In the days of Shamgar son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the roads were abandoned; travelers took to winding paths. ⁷ Village life in Israel ceased, ceased until I, Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel.
- a) OK, time to get to "present" reality. Before this battle took place in the last chapter, life in Israel had become hard. The Israelites were oppressed by the Canaanites. The picture is of the main roads being avoided by the Israelites due to fear of what their enemy could do to them. The locals took the "back roads" to avoid having whatever possessions they had stolen by their enemies, or worse.
 - i) The point for you and me is our fears can get the worst of us. There usually is real danger out there. The issue is about trusting God through those fears and like this battle having the boldness to face the enemies of God's desire for our lives!
 - b) Then Deborah mentions herself. Notice she doesn't think of herself as a great leader or as a person given the gift of prophesy by God. She simply thought of herself as a "mom". It's the idea that we may think our lives are insignificant. Yet even the most simple things like raising Godly children is noticed by God. One never knows if and when God raises us up to a greater role. Remember that heavenly rewards is not based on the size of our ministry but on our faithfulness to whatever it is God called us to do.
 - c) OK, back to the story:
26. Verse 8: When they chose new gods, war came to the city gates, and not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel.
- a) To understand this part of the story, remember that the Israelites were "under the thumb" of an enemy. That means they were not allowed to have weapons. The "40,000" was not a population of the nation figure. It probably refers to the size of the army that fought. The point is God made it possible to provide the tools needed to defeat this enemy.
27. Verse 9: My heart is with Israel's princes, with the willing volunteers among the people. Praise the LORD!
- a) Stop to consider the risk Deborah took with her own life. I'm guessing that the enemies of Israel figured, "She's a harmless woman just giving opinions on how the Israelites should be living". My point is I don't think the Canaanites saw her as a military threat. After all, they had the weapons. The point of this verse, is Deborah realized God is God and she is willing to stand with the Israelites as they fought this enemy. Her praised were for God preserving her own life as well as the volunteers for this battle.
 - b) Ok, why should I care? Because when we're willing to take a stand for the biblically right thing to do, God is with us. He may preserve us through the battle. The point is He'll win in the end so we might as well work to do the right thing!
28. Verse 10: "You who ride on white donkeys, sitting on your saddle blankets, and you who walk along the road, consider ¹¹ the voice of the singers at the watering places. They recite the righteous acts of the LORD, the righteous acts of his warriors in Israel. "Then the people of the LORD went down to the city gates.
- a) I admit, the first thing I had to do was google "white donkeys". In all my years I've never seen one and wanted to make sure it's a real thing. The point as it relates to this verse is a white donkey is rare, and it was a choice of kings and leaders to ride on them to show off their "royalty". The point is to sing out to those who "think they're something special" of just who is really in charge! The specific example here is "common people" volunteered to fight in this battle while the "white donkey" class who feared losing their status or power sat in watched!
 - b) Notice what the soldiers did as they marched off to battle. They recited the "righteous acts of the LORD". That could refer to reciting lines from the law or it could refer to ways He as worked in the past. The point is when we're making the effort to make a difference for God, to recite what He's done (through His commandments or His works), it's a way for us to keep our focus upon Him as we make a difference for Him!

29. Verse 12: 'Wake up, wake up, Deborah! Wake up, wake up, break out in song! Arise, O Barak! Take captive your captives, O son of Abinoam.' ¹³ "Then the men who were left came down to the nobles; the people of the LORD came to me with the mighty.
- The verse is obviously not telling Deborah to wake up out of sleep. (Although I admit it would be a good verse to use when my teenagers want to sleep all day!) It is a dramatic way of saying, "Hey everybody, time to sing praises to God, He was behind the victory we just had our enemy.
 - So who is the son of Abinoam? The answer is from the previous chapter verse 6. It refers to Barak who led the army to victory. Many Israelites had their father's name in effect as a last name. It's just a way to distinguish this Barak from others. In this part of the song we are reading about Barak assembling his "soldiers" and then bringing them to Debora. It is a colorful way of saluting the men who actually fought.
30. Verse 14: Some came from Ephraim, whose roots were in Amalek; Benjamin was with the people who followed you. From Makir captains came down, from Zebulun those who bear a commander's staff. ¹⁵ The princes of Issachar were with Deborah; yes, Issachar was with Barak, rushing after him into the valley. In the districts of Reuben there was much searching of heart.
- One of the things we get in the middle of this chapter is a "tribe by tribe" inventory. It's as if the song wanted to honor those who did fight and shame those who didn't. In these two verses we get recognition of two of the twelve tribes who probably had the most soldiers to volunteer.
 - Here's the point for you and me. I'm positive God loves when we act boldly as to make a difference for Him. Through out the bible you'll find credit given to those who made that difference. It's God's way of saying He's noticing. When we get to heaven, I'm pretty sure there will not be a quiz on "who fought and who didn't". It's just here so we notice the fact that some people volunteered and some "chickened out". I suspect this section is also here as to encourage others to have boldness to make that difference for God!
 - OK enough of the "who did right". Time for the "who did wrong" list.
31. Verse 16: Why did you stay among the campfires to hear the whistling for the flocks? In the districts of Reuben there was much searching of heart. ¹⁷ Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan. And Dan, why did he linger by the ships? Asher remained on the coast and stayed in his coves.
- First realize not all 12 tribes are listed. I suspect these tribes are listed as to say, "They're aware of what happened but choose not to get involved". Keep in mind the Canaanites did have those 900 chariots so it was easy to focus on fear and not on God. Still, when one has their group named in the bible negatively it's an incident I wouldn't want on my resume!
 - A lot of bible commentators like to mention that the territory originally given to the tribe of Dan was never conquered so they moved "elsewhere", which is why they have the ship reference. Now you know that, you can forget about it!
 - The point is all these groups are shamed for refusing to stand up for God. Remember that when they first came into the land, God's marching order was to conquer it. Their lack of help in a sense is a direct disobey of God's order. Just realize when we willfully choose to sin, we too are in effect directly disobeying His orders.
 - OK, enough guilt here, let's move on.
32. Verse 18: The people of Zebulun risked their very lives; so did Naphtali on the heights of the field.
- One last verse about two of the 12 tribes. It's as if the song wanted to surround the bad comments with some good ones. Apparently these two tribes were prominent in fighting this battle.
33. Verse 19: "Kings came, they fought; the kings of Canaan fought at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo, but they carried off no silver, no plunder. ²⁰ From the heavens the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera.
- Here we get a battle detail. The losers (kings refer to leaders) lost the battle, no prizes.

- b) One has to remember in ancient warfare, the prize was to carry away whatever valuables the other side lost. It's a colorful way of saying, "You lost and no prizes for you!"
 - c) Let's pause to remember who Sisera was. He was the general for the other side. So when the text says the "from the heavens the stars fought", think of it as a colorful way of saying God got involved in this battle and turned it for His will.
 - d) OK John, so the Israelites won some ancient battle. Why should I care? My first reaction is to remind us that Israel is "God's land" and He decides who's going to be there. Pause and consider all the nations and empires that have come and gone over the millennia. Tiny little Israel has stood in spite of that. They're the only nation in the history of civilization to be conquered scattered and came back together again to be a nation. They did it twice!
 - i) The second issue is about us using our lives to make a difference for God. To read stories about this is not to learn ancient history. It's to realize God wants us to use our lives to make a difference for Him. Just as He used that ancient army, so He is willing to use you and me if we're willing to make a difference. Many years ago I learned that God's not looking for ability as much as He's looking for availability!
 - ii) With that said, back to the battle details.
34. Verse 21: The river Kishon swept them away, the age-old river, the river Kishon. March on, my soul; be strong! ²² Then thundered the horses' hoofs-- galloping, galloping go his mighty steeds.
- a) This verse gives us a clue about the weather conditions. Remember that chariots are no good in mud. The wheels get stuck. What most commentators speculate is it rained at a time when it rarely rains. The mud swept away the chariot into a local river. If you care this is a small river that feeds into the Mediterranean. Bottom line, God used the weather to make a difference in this battle. That's been a truth throughout history.
35. Verse 23: 'Curse Meroz,' said the angel of the LORD. 'Curse its people bitterly, because they did not come to help the LORD, to help the LORD against the mighty.'
- a) The song singles out what appears to be some city that refused to help. Scholars debate as to the exact location, but it appears to be in the northern portion of Israel where this battle took place (or close to it). The point is even when God leads us to victory, some will still be afraid of what's in front of them.
 - b) The funny thing is how literally this curse came true. Not only is that city no longer on the map, but it's exact location is debated. My point is when the bible curses something, then it is cursed. Personally if the bible curses my city, I'd get the moving signs out.
36. Verse 24: "Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, most blessed of tent-dwelling women. ²⁵ He asked for water, and she gave him milk; in a bowl fit for nobles she brought him curdled milk.
- a) The last ten verses of this song focus on the non-Israelite woman who killed the leader of the enemy. You might recall from the previous chapter that Deborah warned the general that he won't get the credit for killing the leader. So are these verses here to "rub it in" for the Israelite leader? Could be, but I think it's much more than that. God is always looking for people to worship Him, Israelite or not. I'm positive God loves to work on our level as to draw close to Him. Let me explain using this woman Jael as an example.
 - i) We do know she was neutral in the war between the Canaanites and the Israelites.
 - ii) I'm sure she figured out the Israelites won. The combination of a rain storm when one doesn't occur there and the fact the general wanted to hide out in her tent, tells us that she knew who won the battle.
 - iii) Since the Israelites won, she must have figured, "I better finish him off. Then when the Israelites come looking for him, I can say I was on their side!"
 - iv) I think she saw who won and who's God is "real" and figured, I should kill him as that way the Israelites may spare my life.
 - v) One more bit of trivia. For the tent dwelling tribes in the Middle East, it's usually the women who set up the tents. She had the strength and the tools to do this!

- b) Given all of that, instead of reaching for a water pouch (it was drunk in goatskins) she got another goatskin filled with warm milk and essentially cottage cheese. I suspect she had a few children, which is why she kept the milk, but that's speculation.
 - c) Now think about this from the soon to be dead man's perspective. He was exhausted from the battle and running away. My guess is he tasted the milk and thought, "This isn't water but I'm horribly thirsty and drunk it down. Between the king being "dead tired" and what he drank, he was out!
 - d) Is it possible he woke up when he felt the peg against his forehead? Sure. My guess is he was so tired, he let it go. It's like when one is half asleep and feels a headache, and thinks maybe it'll go away if I ignore it.
 - e) OK, enough facts and speculation. Let's finish the chapter.
37. Verse 26: Her hand reached for the tent peg, her right hand for the workman's hammer. She struck Sisera, she crushed his head, she shattered and pierced his temple. ²⁷ At her feet he sank, he fell; there he lay. At her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell--dead.
- a) I admit if I was Barak reading all of this, I'd be embarrassed. Deborah said the glory will go to another and all the verses here support that.
 - b) So what's the lesson? It's about living as God desires or facing the consequences. Realize not all issues are salvation oriented. This one has to do with obedience and what happens when we fail to be obedient.
 - c) I could comment more on these verses, but you get the idea by now.
38. Verse 28: "Through the window peered Sisera's mother; behind the lattice she cried out, `Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why is the clatter of his chariots delayed?' ²⁹ The wisest of her ladies answer her; indeed, she keeps saying to herself, ³⁰ `Are they not finding and dividing the spoils: a girl or two for each man, colorful garments as plunder for Sisera, colorful garments embroidered, highly embroidered garments for my neck-- all this as plunder?"
- a) Verses 28 to 30 are a "fantasy" scene. It's an image of the mother of the woman who's son just got killed. The mom's thinking, "Where is the victory? Where is the spoil? I'm used to my son winning big battles with all his chariots and I get to reap some of that spoil!
 - b) Keep in mind this "mom" was among the people God ordered the Israelites to wipe out. It shows she didn't care for the god of the Israelites but only wanted stuff for herself!
 - c) Is it possible Deborah knew something about her reputation? No idea. I think it's more of a statement about those the Israelites were called to wipe out! All that mattered to them is "stuff" and not who the true God is. Remember they lived in Israel and probably knew the history of the Israelites to this point. The fact they cared more about stuff than God is why most people reject God to this day.
 - d) OK enough of that. One more verse:
39. Verse 31: "So may all your enemies perish, O LORD! But may they who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength." Then the land had peace forty years.
- a) The song ends in effect with an encouragement for the Israelites to seek God. Yes they did for awhile, but eventually the appeal of the world got to them. The fact that the land had peace for 40 years is probably the length of time that generation who saw God lead them into victory. Don't know. I just know there are benefits for trusting God. These chapters are full of lessons on the benefits of serving God and the consequences of ignoring Him.
 - b) With that said, I'll close in prayer.
40. Heavenly Father, First we thank You that You've separated us so we can serve You. Help us not to waste the most valuable gift you've given us, our time and resources. Give us the boldness to make a difference for You. Make it obvious to us what it is You desire of us Guide our lives so we're available for Your service. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.