



International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

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Judges 4:1-10

English Standard Version

June 4, 2017

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, June 4, 2017**, is from **Judges 4:1-10**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

(Judges 4:1) And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD after Ehud died.

The Book of Joshua shows that those who remembered the conquest of the Promised Land and remained faithful to the LORD experienced victory after victory. The Book of Judges shows how the Israelites repeatedly turned to false gods and evil practices so the LORD had to punish them by making them slaves of their enemies. Some of these enemies were those they had not driven out of the Promised Land (such as the Canaanites) and others were their foreign neighbors. The Book of Joshua also shows how our merciful God raised up judges to save them repeatedly in spite of their rebellious ways and idolatry. They usually returned to their evil ways after the death of a judge. In some cases, after a judge freed them from oppression, the judge led them back into idolatry or became a bad example to others with their evil or unwise decisions.

(Judges 4:2) And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim.

Because of their evil and idolatrous ways, God sold the Israelites into slavery under Jabin, probably a dynastic name (such as the Davidic dynasty established by King David through his children). The name Jabin means: "the wise," and probably everyone who was a king of Hazor took that title from their father. For example, the first Jabin was

king of Hazor when Joshua entered the Promised Land (see Joshua 11:1). The next Jabin listed in the Bible lived during the time of Deborah, the judge. Since the Canaanites still inhabited the Promised Land, they did not need to invade the land to enslave their neighbors. Hazor means “fortified:” it was a fortified city or fortress. Hazor was north of the Sea of Galilee. The name Sisera means “servant of Ra,” an Egyptian idol. Sisera, the military commander, made the reign of the Jabin dynasty possible. If Sisera could be defeated decisively, the Israelites would be freed.

(Judges 4:3) Then the people of Israel cried out to the LORD for help, for he had 900 chariots of iron and he oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for twenty years.

The name “Harosheth Haggoyim” means “smithy of the nations.” A “smithy” was a worker in iron,” similar to “blacksmiths” in the old west in America. The Israelites were in the process moving out of the Bronze Age and were no match for armies with new Iron Age weapons, which were made as an industry in Harosheth Haggoyim. The Israelites had to be cruelly oppressed for twenty years before they realized that their idols were powerless to help them and before they repented of their sins and cried out to God to save them. They looked for a judge to save them as God had done in the past.

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

The name Deborah means “Bee.” Deborah was both a judge and a prophet. As such, she was the most morally mature, godly, and spiritually sensitive of all the judges in the Book of Judges. Unlike the other judges, she consistently pointed her people to the LORD. She was the fourth judge listed in the Book of Judges. Four other women prophets are named in the Old Testament: Miriam (Exodus 15:20), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Isaiah’s wife (Isaiah 8:3), and a false prophetess, Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14). The prophetess, Anna, is named in the New Testament (Luke 2:36).

(Judges 4:5) She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment.

As a judge, Deborah did not sit at a city gate as was the custom of the elders of a city who decided cases between citizens at the gate. She probably camped in an oasis type setting well-known as the Palm of Deborah: well-known because of who she was. As a judge, similar to Moses and those he appointed under him, she settled cases as in a court of law between disputants. Perhaps most of those who went to her for judgments were from the tribes of Ephraim, Naphtali, and Zebulun, since the Israelites were still twelve tribes

and not yet united under a king until the time of King Saul. The country of Ephraim is quite prominent in the Book of Judges.

(Judges 4:6) She sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali and said to him, “Has not the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you, ‘Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun.

The name “Barak” means “lightning.” Some translations interpret her remarks to Barak as a question, as though he had been delaying his obedience to God. In the original Hebrew, we do not know if she asked him a question about a former command, or gave him a direct command as God’s prophet at the time she spoke to him. The command was specific as to where he was to get the soldiers to fight, how many to get, where they were to go. Barak obeyed the LORD’s command explicitly. Chariots would be useless fighting mountaintop defenders except as a vehicle at the foot of a mountain from which to shoot arrows.

(Judges 4:7) And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin’s army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand?’”

As God can do with anyone, God himself would influence all of Sisera’s actions in the forthcoming battle and lead him to a decisive defeat: “In the LORD’s hand the king’s heart is a stream of water that he channels toward all who please him” (Proverbs 21:1). God would lead the Canaanite army into a valley through which flowed the Kishon River (see Judges 5:21). There, God would defeat them by sending rain and floodwaters to mire the heavy iron chariots in the mud; then, the Israelite army could more easily defeat them totally, which they did. To punish the Israelites for their idolatry and rebellion, God often fought with their enemies against them. To save the Israelites from slavery, God would fight with them against their enemies.

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

Women did not lead men into battle at that time, but Barak would not go into battle without Deborah; perhaps he wanted her to intercede with God as they fought to assure them the victory. She was the recognized spokesman for the LORD, so she readily agreed to go with the army. She would be able to give Barak additional orders from the LORD as Barak needed them.

(Judges 4:9) And she said, “I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.” Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh.

Located in Naphtali, Kedesh means “sanctuary,” and it was one of the sanctuary cities (cities of refuge) in the Promised Land. In the Bible, Deborah diplomatically agreed to go with Barak. The reader is left with the impression that Deborah would be the hero of the battle, but we learn later in chapter 4 that Jael is the woman who will kill Sisera after his army is totally defeated. Indeed, the honor of defeating Sisera went to a woman.

(Judges 4:10) And Barak called out Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh. And 10,000 men went up at his heels, and Deborah went up with him.

The Bible tells us that Barak obeyed the command of God and Deborah honored his request to go with him. She was probably a great help in recruiting the 10,000 soldiers he was told by God to take into battle. She could be the witness that God indeed wanted no more and less than 10,000 soldiers to follow Barak in order to defeat the army of Sisera, which the Israelites did with the help of God. After the Canaanites were defeated, the Israelites had peace for forty years until they once again did evil in the sight of God, so God had to punish them again, and later raise up a new judge to save them again.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why were the Israelites defeated so many times after the death of Joshua and Caleb?
2. Why did God raise up judges among the Israelites?
3. Who was the most moral, godly, and spiritually sensitive judge in the Book of Judges?
4. When Barak agreed to do what he was commanded, what condition did he set before he would take action? Why do you think he did so?
5. In all of the battles that Israel fought in the Book of Judges, what side did God fight on in each battle?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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