

The Song of Deborah and Barak, a story

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To get the most benefit from this story, read Judges 4:1-24. Also know this is a story of how I picture the events if they were made into a movie. The general information is accurate, but I have embellished details (much like what you would see with a historical fiction movie that is “based on a true story”).

Why a story? The story is a great way to illustrate the drama of redemption. It shows history in action I like how Susan Arthur put it in her book: *Shaped by God: Twelve Essentials for Nurturing Faith in Children, Youth, and Adults*:

We are story-formed people. Our lives are first shaped by narrative, not by information. We don't learn how to live the Christian life by memorizing facts, etc... Instead, from our earliest moments we experience the stories of those who have gone before us: stories from the Old and New Testaments; stories from the history of the Church throughout the centuries; stories of our own families and local congregation; stories that are enacted each week in the drama we call worship and in the everyday conversations and practices of the home... We begin to see our lives as part of a pattern within the larger story of redemption. We long to live a life worthy of that story. We begin to desire the right things... It's not the Bible as encyclopedia that shapes us, but the Bible as story. It's the story that teaches us to love the right things, to dream the right things, to practice the right things. Eventually, in our congregations, classrooms, and homes, we –by God's grace– live lives worthy of the story in which we find ourselves.”

A little bit about the characters: the protagonists are...

- Deborah (whose name means “bee”): one of the judges of Israel who set up a place of ministry between the cities of Bethel and Ramah.
- Barak (whose name means “blessing”): lived in Kadesh-Naphtali, southern end of the Sea of Galilee – which was about 60 miles from Bethel (as the crow flies).

The antagonists:

- Jabin, King of Canaan: lived in Hazor (northern most province of Israel)
- Sisera: Commander of Jabin's army stationed in Haroseth-hagoyim

The battle played out as follows:

1. Barak and his army assembled on Mount Tabor. Mount Tabor is where most scholars believe the transfiguration of Jesus took place (when Peter, James and John saw Jesus in his glory and talking with Moses and Elijah).
2. The Lord drew Sisera and his men toward Mt. Tabor by way of the valley of the River Kishon
3. Barak and his men descended Tabor to fight with Sisera in the plains.

Scene 1

It was just before dawn when Deborah felt something tickle her nose. She was too sleepy to care about it, but then the tickle marched down her cheek to her chin and then onto her neck where she couldn't take it any longer. She bolted up and swatted at her face, fearing a spider or centipede had invaded her bed.

She was relieved to hear the soft buzz of a honey bee echoing through her room. It was one of hers, no doubt, who was up early and had wandered into her room looking for fresh cut wild flowers she liked to put by her bedside. She spoke to the bee as if it were a colleague: *“Hello, little fellow. You're up early.”* She sighed. *“I guess I should be getting up too. If today is like yesterday, it'll be busy.”* The bee paid no attention but simply alighted on the bouquet situated in a clay vase by her bed.

The morning light was slowly penetrating her room and Deborah watched as the bee moved from flower to flower to collect nectar. Deborah looked next to her and found her husband, Lappidoth, had already risen and was probably tending the animals.

Deborah stood up and tidied the bed linens. She washed her face, pulled a dress over her head, and donned a shawl and sandals before walking outside. She was anxious to check on her beehive which had been neglected in recent days.

The sun was breaking over the horizon as she walked toward an overhanging canopy where she kept her bee keeping supplies. Deborah stuffed a large mouth clay jar full of dead leaves and drizzled in a spoonful of olive oil before lighting it on fire. After a few seconds the jar was puffing smoke beautifully. Deborah walked a few feet to her beehive which she had stationed under a large oak tree. The hive was a work of art that her husband had made. It was sculpted of grey clay from the river. It was round and stood about waist high. A little slit was carved towards the bottom, and under the slit he had embedded a flat rock from the river. It acted as a landing pad for the workers going in and out. Inside he had added thick branches in rows where the bees could construct their honey combs.

Deborah removed a large stone holding down the wooden lid.

She slowly lifted the lid just enough to let a little smoke seep into the hive. She finally took off the lid and looked in. Her little bees were working hard. Deborah scanned the hive and found the queen bee. Directing her speech to the queen she

said with a sigh, *“How do you do it? How do you keep your hive working together in such harmony? All of you diligently working to make honey. Oh how the Lord has given you focus!”*

Upon inspection, the hive was doing fine. She had been concerned for nothing. It made her feel better, though, just to peak in and see. Nothing needed to be done but remove some of the honey for her family. Deborah reached down and tore off a chunk of honeycomb, gave it a little shake to shake off some bees, and then placed it on a large dish. From that chunk, she pinched a smaller piece which she popped in her mouth. She closed her eyes and savored the sweetness. She said aloud, *“Oh blessed be your name, O Lord, for creating something so simple and sweet!”* She secured the hive and went back to the house.

When Deborah walked in the main room, she washed her hands and covered the plate of dripping honey comb. She went back into her bedroom and picked up a tall basket that contained five parchment scrolls. Each one was precious to her. They were the Words of God, copies from the original five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. While most women of her day couldn't read, nor did they want to, Deborah was different. From an early age she wanted to know things! It was hard in that time for a girl, but she had found someone to teach her. And having learned to read and write, she devoured the Word of God. Deborah also wrote some of her own poetry that she used in praise of God.

Deborah grabbed one more basket that contained some food and freshly baked bread that had been made the night before. She locked up the house, and walked their donkey out of the stable. She strapped the baskets to the donkey's back and walked with it toward the village of Ramah. When she arrived in the town square, it was like a ghost town. No commerce. No children laughing in the streets. It was empty and silent. Praying aloud she said, *“Oh Lord, have mercy on your people. Let there be a vibrant community again! Why has everyone abandoned you? Why have they abandoned each other?”* Even as she prayed, she knew the answers. The land of Israel was dominated by fear. King Jabin's oppression over Northern Israel was slowly moving south. And if he wasn't stopped, he and his forces would reach Manasseh and eventually Ephraim. Families had fled the cities to live secluded and alone. What grieved her more was that most of Israel had abandoned God for idols, and God had promised oppression from the enemy if worship of the Lord was neglected.

Scene 2

Deborah walked north from Ramah on the main thoroughfare towards Bethel. She arrived at her destination before anyone else had come. It was still early and she savored the silence each day. Just a few feet from the road, she tied off her donkey so it could graze, and she removed the packs from its back. Deborah sat down on a bench behind a square wooden table. There were other chairs and benches in the clearing, and the whole scene was situated under a huge palm tree that had come to be known as *the Palm of Deborah*. It wasn't her idea to name the tree after her, it just happened. Behind the palm was a chattering brook that served as a place of refreshment, and provided soothing ambient noise during the day. Several of the elders felt she should have an indoor meeting place because it was safer. But she preferred being out in nature where she felt closer to God. She knew the Lord had called her to serve him by counseling his people, and while the work was a challenge, she loved being busy. Plus, after doing this for several years, she knew all the answers to life's problems were to be found in the Word of God.

Deborah sat at her table and carefully unrolled the scroll of Exodus. She found the place where she had ended yesterday and began her reading for the day. She was at the part when the Lord hovered over Mount Sinai to give the law to his people. Deborah read of the storm, the bolts of lightning and the quaking mountain spewing out fire and brimstone. Her skin tingled as she pictured the events and the awesome power of Almighty Yahweh.

She paused to pray. *“Oh Yahweh, would you show your power again?! Your people have abandoned your ways. They have forsaken your laws. Please act. Please bring salvation and peace once again. Turn the hearts of your people back to you!”*

Even as she prayed, for some reason her thoughts suddenly turned toward her bees. *“Yes Lord,”* she continued, *“Give your people a taste of the sweetness of your Word! Let them be like my busy bees focused on one thing and one thing only – YOU!”*

Slowly and silently, Deborah felt the Spirit of God move within her heart, filling her body with a peace and comfort that couldn't be described. She knew at once what the Lord was communicating to her: She was the one whom God had chosen to help bring unity to Israel. She was the one to be used of the Lord to turn Israel's vision back to the one true God.

Understanding these thoughts, she cried out, *“But Lord, how? I'm a woman, not a warrior. I'm not strong like Othniel or Shamgar. I'm a counselor, not a commander. But, Lord, I will do what you tell me; just tell me what to do.”*

Her thoughts were interrupted by a distant sound. Deborah looked up to see a young couple shuffling toward her along the path. The husband and wife were on foot and it looked like they had been walking for days. Their clothes were dirty, and tear stains had made crooked tracks down their dusty faces.

“Is this the Palm of Deborah? Are you Deborah?” the man asked with desperation.

"Yes," answered Deborah. She recognized the accent immediately. The couple was from the Tribe of Issachar. Deborah jumped from her seat and reached into her basket for some food.

"Please," said Deborah compassionately, *"come and have breakfast. Here is fresh bread and sweet honey. Come and eat, and tell me your sorrows."*

The couple sunk into the chairs before her, and Deborah placed bread on some plates and then drizzled amber honey over the loaves. The couple thanked her and dove into the meal. Deborah watched them and already surmised what they were going through.

Deborah broke the ice, *"I've seen this look of grief before. This is the work of Sisera, is it not?"* Sisera was King Jabin's military commander who was known for his cruelty. In the days of Othniel and Ehud, marauding armies usually just took livestock and crops. Sisera was different. He and his men had an insatiable passion for women. There were horrific stories of Sisera's army coming into a village and taking all the young girls to be used for personal sex slaves. Deborah's heart sank because she already knew the plight of this couple.

The husband, whose name was Perez, stopped eating, put down his bread and looked up at Deborah. He was startled to see tears forming in her eyes like little pools. Everything was silent except for the babbling brook behind them.

"Yes," he said, dropping his head again, *"One week ago Sisera and his army invaded our village with his iron chariots. Those things are unstoppable. My wife and daughter and I fled into the hills, hoping we could escape. His soldiers tracked us down, though, and tore our 12 year old daughter, Rebecca, from our arms. I can still hear her screaming my name!"*

The couple's eyes flooded again with tears as Deborah's heart was ripped in two. Anger was rising, but she kept it at bay. Sadly, this couple's story was not unique.

"What can I do?" asked Deborah. *"Why have you come all this way?"*

Perez' wife joined the conversation: *"Ever since Sisera took our daughter, we, my husband and I, have been fighting each other. I have been pleaded with him for us to build an altar to Ashera and sacrifice our only goat to her. She's the goddess of happiness, and all my friends have told me Ashera will help us get our daughter back, but it'll cost us. But he won't do it."*

Deborah's face began to turn red. The anger in her was welling up, but the wife was still talking.

The woman looked spitefully at her husband, *"For the last week I have told my husband we should appeal to Ashera, but he still refuses. Where is his faith? Doesn't he want to do what it takes to get our daughter back? That's why I persuaded him to come and see you. Deborah, please... make him see reason!"*

Deborah saw the whole picture now and her righteous indignation was fully ablaze. She was angry Israel had fallen so far. She was angered that some floozy goddess was being prescribed as the cure. She was angrier still that this woman was manipulating her husband and not respecting his rightful decision NOT to sacrifice to Ashera.

Giving full vent to her emotions, Deborah slammed her fist on the table. The plates echoed a double knock which startled the couple.

Deborah had their attention. She reached for the scroll of Deuteronomy and flipped it open to a passage she could have recited by heart. She wanted, though, for the couple to hear and see it referenced. *"Listen to this holy Word of Yahweh. It's straight from the Law of our God:*

It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you— for the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth."

Deborah looked up at the wife and fired a question straight at her: *"Tell me, what did I just read?"*

The wife looked down and said sheepishly, *"That Israel is not to worship any other God but Yahweh?"*

"And do you and your husband belong to Israel?" asked Deborah.

"Yes," the woman replied softly.

Deborah softened her speech and reached out to touch the woman's hand: *"Then tell me, child, according to the Word of our God, did your husband act righteously in not building an altar to Ashera?"*

"Yes," the woman said quietly. *"He did."*

Deborah let the silence do its work. Slowly the woman looked at her husband and said, *"I am sorry,"* and then began to weep.

The husband reached around and put his arm around his wife. He sobbed too and then looked back to Deborah. *"What about our daughter?"*

Deborah sighed, *"The truth is: only Yahweh can help. Ashera, Baal, Molech... all these gods are nothing. Cursed be their names! Pray to Yahweh, the only true and living God, our God. Sacrifice to Yahweh. Ask him to watch over your daughter, and if he wills it, to restore her to you. This will give you some peace."*

"And," Deborah added, "Can you read?"

"I can," Perez answered.

"Good," said Deborah, "on your way home, travel north on this road. Pass through Bethel and go directly to Shiloh. Go to the Lord's Tabernacle and ask one of the Levites ministering there to give you a copy of the Pentateuch. Take it and read it. Read it to your wife. Read it everyday. Your soul will find it to be sweeter than honey. Go, now, in the peace of Yahweh."

The couple meandered off and Deborah watched them disappear into the distance. "Oh Lord," she prayed, "You alone are sovereign. Please protect their daughter and by some miracle bring her home."

Deborah looked around and took in the silence. It wouldn't be long until others would be arriving. Some would be coming for wisdom. On a fine day like this, some would be coming simply to enjoy the fellowship of community. Others were Deborah's carriers for errands or messages.

As she waited, her mind drifted back to her original prayer of what to do. A sudden breeze blew through the palms above her, and along with it, a voice from the Spirit of God. It was unmistakable. Deborah was being allowed to hear the counsel of Almighty God. She felt a little bit like the bee in her room with whom she had conversed that morning. But this was more real, more tangible. She heard, or rather overhead, God's plan for saving Israel! It was clear as the water in the brook behind her. She knew exactly what to do.

Scene 3

After about half an hour, others began to arrive and greet her. Deborah was anxious for her couriers to arrive, and she often glanced at the road for the first one who might show up. Finally, a young man named Benjamin arrived. He was walking slowly and munching on an apple. He would do.

"Ben!" called Deborah. Ben looked up and jogged to her.

"Yes, ma'am, what do you need?"

Deborah wasted no time, "It is urgent, Benjamin. Take my donkey and ride as fast as you can to Kadesh-Naphtali. When you get there, ask for Barak the son of Abinoam."

"Who's he?" asked Ben, biting a large chunk out of the apple.

"That doesn't concern you now. All I want you to concern yourself with is finding him and bringing him here by sunset. By sunset! Can you do this?"

"I can, and I'll go as fast as I can," answered Ben.

"Good," said Deborah. "Now, here's some silver. Get some food for you and Barak and come back as soon as you can."

Ben untied the donkey and gave it the remainder of his apple to eat. The donkey munched on the apple as Ben saddled him up and led him to the road. Deborah watched as Ben mounted the donkey and rode north with a quick trot.

"May the Lord God be with you and give you speed," Deborah called as Ben disappeared.

For the rest of the morning, Deborah sat under the giant palm and counseled all who came seeking wisdom of the Lord. With each problem and inquiry, Deborah always opened up the Word of God to let it speak directly into each situation. Deborah was direct and uncompromising. She didn't like excuses or blatant disobedience, and she was never afraid to call out someone who wasn't obeying the Lord. Word of her wisdom had spread throughout Israel, and many came far and wide to seek her counsel.

As the day turned into afternoon and the shadows were lengthening, Deborah heard the sound of horses. *It's him*, Deborah said to herself. She stood up and saw Barak arriving on horseback. Ben and her donkey were following closely behind.

Barak halted his steed and dismounted. He was tall and blessed with a strong frame. He was a born warrior and was not a man to be trifled with. Barak bowed his head and knelt in surprising humility.

Deborah addressed him first, "Barak, son of Abinoam, the Lord be with you."

"And also with you, Deborah, wife of Lappidoth and mother to Israel" responded Barak with a voice of warm compassion. He stood up and continued, "For what reason, O wise Deborah, have you summoned me?"

Deborah came around to the front of the table and invited Barak to sit. She served him some food and sat down next to him. Everyone who was still present was silently waiting to hear what she was about to say.

She looked at him and studied his eyes. "The Word of the Lord has spoken to you, has it not?"

"It has," answered Barak in a deep baritone, "just this morning when I felt a sudden breeze that seemed to have come over the Sea of Galilee."

"I heard it, too," said Deborah, "clear as the water in this brook, and even more refreshing."

"And what did you hear?" asked Barak leaning in with a slight grin.

Deborah smiled and stood up. She looked at Barak but spoke loud enough for everyone around to hear: *"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. 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'?"*

Barak stood up and said, *"Yes, that is the very word spoken to me. I was sending out messengers when your courier arrived with the news you wanted to see me. I then knew this was of the Lord. Your word was confirmation that the Lord is about to act on behalf of his people, Israel!"*

Deborah sat down again and blessed the Lord. She looked up at Barak and said, *"You are the blessing of Israel. How rightly did your father name you, Barak. You are a blessing."*

Barak smiled, and Deborah said quickly, *"Well, what are you waiting for? Do not let me detain you. Go in the strength and power of Yahweh."*

Barak sat back down and looked at Deborah, *"I will go, but only if you will go with me. If you go, I will go. But if you don't go, I won't go either."*

Deborah grabbed her heart. *"Me? A woman, into battle? No, I cannot, I will not. My place is here. I'm a woman, not a warrior. I'm a counselor, not a commander."*

Barak was silent for a moment and then said softly, *"Deborah, your reputation is known throughout the land of Israel. Your wisdom has blessed countless lives. The Spirit of the Living God is upon you. Like it or not, the Lord is with you. And because the Lord is with you, I want you with me. I believe the Lord wants to show his might and power like he did in the time of Moses and Aaron. Don't you want to witness the awesome power of Elshadai?"*

Deborah smiled inside. She did want to see God's power unleashed. There was no denying it. She truly did want to watch God rescue his precious children from the hand of Jabin and Sisera.

As Deborah pondered these thoughts, Barak said softly, *"Please Deborah, I beseech you. Come."*

Deborah looked up and said, *"It is settled, I will surely go with you. But you must know, Barak, that the road in which this leads will not be to your glory over Sisera. That glory will go to a woman."*

"So be it," answered Barak, *"I only want to see all glory go to the Lord, the God of Israel."*

"Well," said Deborah, *"you shall stay as a guest in our home tonight, and tomorrow we shall leave at first light."*

Scene 4

Deborah and her husband woke early the following morning. Deborah was nervous but excited. Lappidoth, her husband, was a quiet and humble man, and his constant faith in God was a comfort for Deborah. He didn't seem the least bit bothered that his wife was going into battle, even if it was to watch and simply be there. Lappidoth arose and fed the livestock and got Deborah's donkey ready. Deborah got herself ready and packed a small tent and a satchel of provisions for the road ahead.

She walked outside into the quietness of the morning and found Barak and Lappidoth beside the stables talking in depth about horses and chariots. *What is it about men and transportation?* she thought.

Deborah walked up to them and said, *"I'm ready. Let's go."*

Barak mounted his horse as Lappidoth hoisted his wife onto their donkey. She looked down at her husband. *"Dear Lappidoth,"* she said while touching his face, *"will you see to my bees while I'm gone?"*

"I will," said Lappidoth, as he scratched his head, *"But they don't like me like they like you. I always get stung."*

"Try talking to them. They may not understand, but it'll help."

Lappidoth smiled as Barak and Deborah made it to the road and turned north. When they arrived at the main road, Deborah was surprised to see a crowd of men. Some were on horses, some on donkeys, and some on foot.

"Hail Barak! Hail Deborah!" they all called.

"What is this?" asked Deborah as she recognized many faces from her clan of Ephraim.

"We're going to war with you!" one shouted. *"It is okay, isn't it?"* he quickly added.

"Of course it is," boomed Barak, *"And I hope all Israel joins in the fight!"*

"Good," said the other, *"Because last night we dispatched messengers to the tribes of Dan, Benjamin, Mannaseh, Reuben, Issachar, Zebulun, Asher, Gad, and Naphtali. We don't know if all will come, but what if they do?"*

Tears welled up in Deborah's eyes. She looked up and said, *"Bless the Lord, Oh my soul. The Lord is moving in the hearts of his people."*

"Amen" said Barak, *"Now let's ride. All who can keep up, follow Deborah and me. Those on foot, make your way as fast as you can to the land of Naphtali. We will meet you on the peak of Mount Tabor tonight. Tomorrow morning we battle."*

Cheers resounded as the army made its way northward on the King's Highway. All along the road, more men joined the throng. Deborah looked around and noticed that hardly anyone had weapons of metal. Barak had a sword, shield, and javelin. In the crowd she saw a few crude swords, but hardly any shields. Most had fashioned weapons from sticks and rocks. The Benjaminites, she knew, had concealed sling shots – which could be deadly. But what did it matter? The Lord could save through no weapons at all.

By mid-afternoon, the army reached the base of Mount Tabor. Barak halted the army and swung his steed around to address the men.

"Men, the Lord has commanded that we gather on this mountain. He has said that he will draw out Sisera and his chariots to pursue us, and we will overtake them at the Kishon River. Before we ascend to spend the night on this mountain, who will volunteer to take a message from me to Sisera and provoke him?"

"I will" came a small voice in the crowd. And riding forward on a pony was Deborah's courier, Benjamin.

"Oh Ben," said Deborah compassionately as she saw the young boy appear before Barak. Like the day before, Ben was munching on a red apple, content to simply be there.

"It's a dangerous mission," said Barak, "are you sure you want this task?"

"I'm sure," said Ben. "Sisera won't suspect me. Besides, I'm just delivering a message."

Barak reached in his saddle bag and pulled out a scroll sealed with a brownish wax seal. He handed it to Ben and said, "Deliver this into the hand of Sisera, and then get away as fast as you can."

Ben took the scroll, tucked it into his cloak, dropped his apple core and galloped toward the west.

"May the Lord protect you, Benjamin," Deborah prayed as Ben disappeared from view.

Scene 5

When Barak and his army reached the peak of Mount Tabor, they were overjoyed to find over 10,000 troops from Naphtali and Zebulun already assembled and making camp. Barak introduced Deborah to his captains, all of whom were honored to meet this woman they had only heard about.

By sunset, Deborah had set up a small tent for herself. It wasn't long before the rest of the army who had come on foot was arriving on the mountain top. Songs were being sung, and various soups and stews were steaming around the scattered camp fires.

Deborah walked to the western edge of the peak where she could see the great ocean far off in the distance. She watched as the sun seemed to be sinking into the sea. As she took in the beauty, Barak approached her from behind.

"Is all well, Barak?" She asked without taking her gaze off the sunset.

"It is, praise be to Adonai. Benjamin just arrived back safe and sound."

Deborah thanked the Lord in her heart. "And?" she asked anticipating there was more news.

"And..." said Barak, "Ben delivered the message, and Sisera read it in his presence. Ben said he blew his temper and yelled back, 'You tell that slime of a man, Barak, whoever he is, that tomorrow I will...' and Barak paused.

"And I will what?" asked Deborah, looking back at Barak.

"I'm sorry," said Barak, "it wouldn't be polite to repeat exactly what he said."

"Oh," said Deborah. "Well, whatever it was, he and Jabin have defied the Name of the Lord, the God of Heaven and Earth. Tomorrow he will meet the Lord and have to answer for his crimes."

Barak bid her good night, and Deborah retired to her tent.

Scene 6

In the middle of the night, Deborah found she couldn't sleep. She got up and left her tent to walk and pray. The night air was cool, and the moon was shining full. Everything around her looked like it was made of silver.

In the stillness of the night, Deborah prayed, "Oh Lord, I praise you that you will redeem your people once again as you did in the days of Joshua, and as you did for Othniel and Ehud. But even if Israel turns back to you, who's to say that after several years that they forget you again. You have said yourself, 'We are a stubborn people'?"

Deborah continued. "I have tried to be a counselor to your people, and I thank you that many have listened and turned back to you. I thank you that you have given me your Holy Spirit to instruct me. But Lord, they need more! They, too, need your Spirit. I pray as Moses said to young Joshua: that you would pour out your Spirit on all your people."

As Deborah stood silent before the Lord, within a matter of seconds a cloud had blown onto the mountain. Deborah looked around and found she was totally enveloped by the cloud. She could see nothing but whiteness all around. A profound sense of peace came over her. It was so glorious that any amount of fear or anxiety she had simply melted away. She wanted to stay in this cloud forever. She knew at once she was in the presence of God, and time seemed to

come to a complete halt. Deborah sighed to herself and prayed, *“Oh Lord, you are in charge. You know what is best. Thy will be done, Oh Lord.”*

No sooner had she said this than the cloud dissipated. She found it was early morning, and the men were starting to stir. Deborah looked at the sky. It was a deep crimson red, and ominous clouds were churning in the heavens. A strong wind was already blowing making a loud racket through camp as it dislodged canvases and debris.

Deborah marveled at the sky and then ran to Barak’s tent. He was rolling it up when Deborah called to him, *“Barak, up!”* She looked up, and his gaze followed hers. He surmised the clouds and laughed a mighty laugh.

Deborah yelled over the growing wind, *“This is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the Lord go out before you?!”*

“Yes he does!” boomed Barak with a look of wild excitement.

Barak lifted a horn to his lips and blew a long blast over the howling wind. Soldiers and warriors gathered to him. Deborah ran back to her tent and rolled it up. She threw on her cloak and stuffed her supplies into her donkey’s saddle bags. Finally she mounted the donkey and rejoined the men. The wind was blowing something fierce, but the storm was not yet upon them.

Barak sounded the horn again and the whole company of soldiers rushed down the mountain on its southwestern side. Deborah followed from a distance, waiting to see what would happen.

Scene 7

Meanwhile, in the town of Haroseth-hagoyim, Sisera mustered all his soldiers and made ready his famous 900 chariots of iron and his army of soldiers. The Israelites and their paltry weapons of sticks and stones were no match for his iron-clad war machines.

Sisera stood in his chariot at the front of his army riding out full speed towards Mount Tabor. *“What a fool!”* thought Sisera, *“for Barak to bring his army into the plains of Kishon. It’s wide open and we’ll slaughter them all.”*

As Sisera and his army rode out, the skies turned blacker. The wind was channeled through the valley stirring up dust and branches, making it hard to drive forward. When the army neared the plain, the skies tore open. Lightning cracked through the heavens, and hail came hurling down pummeling the men. They held their shields above their heads for protection. And then the rain came. Sheets and sheets of rain dumped on the men until they were drenched. They pressed on eastward slower because of the rain. When they thought they were through the worst of it, they heard a new noise coming from behind. They turned, and to their dismay, the River Kishon had swelled into a muddy torrent of rapids. It had overflowed its banks and overtook them in an instant. The solid ground all around them quickly turned into mud.

The chariots came to a halt, stuck fast in the mud and stranded by their sheer weight. Sisera and his army were sitting ducks in the open plain. As they realized their plight, they heard a battle horn sound out in front of them. They shrieked as Barak and his army came thundering in. It was larger than anticipated. Israelites seemed to be coming from all directions. Sisera’s army was running everywhere, and Sisera himself panicked and ran from his chariot to a nearby grove of trees. He ran as fast as he could about the time Barak reached the army.

Sisera fled and didn’t look back. Had he stayed, he would have seen his entire army mowed down by Israel. No one escaped.

By this time Deborah had reached the battle, and it didn’t take her long to comprehend what had happened. It was all God. God had sent the storm. God had ordered the wind. God had hurled the hailstones. God had ordered the flood that bogged the chariots! Praise be to God who has won the victory!

Down on the edge of battle, Barak hacked through enemy soldiers, all the while looking for Sisera. He was no where to be found. Barak found his chariot and was able to track a few footprints in the mud going away from the battle. Barak followed the tracks to the grove of trees where Sisera had hid. It was at this time that Deborah rode up and joined him.

“Sisera was here,” said Barak. *“Come with me, let’s track him!”*

Deborah followed Barak and was impressed with his skill. He didn’t miss a thing. *“You’re good at this,”* said Deborah as they trekked through the woods.

“I track deer for hunting,” said Barak. *“This is easy compared to them. What a coward!”* mumbled Barak.

Deborah followed on, watching Barak trace the clues.

The hunt went on for another hour making their way towards Kadesh when the two came into a clearing. Around the clearing were canvas tents and a few sheep and goats.

“Do you know this place?” asked Deborah.

“I do,” said Barak. *“This is the current residence of Heber the Kenite.”* Deborah at once knew this was a descendant of Moses’ father-in-law. The Kenites feared God and even worshiped him, but they never really aligned totally with Israel.

As Barak and Deborah walked towards the tents, they found a woman ringing out wet clothes that had been soaked in the previous rain. She was hanging them over a chord stretched between two trees.

Barak addressed her first, *"Shalom. I am Barak son of Abinoam, and this is Deborah of Ephraim, wife of Lappidoth."* The woman bowed. *"Is Heber the Kenite here?"*

"I am sorry. He is not," said the woman, *"He is out in the fields. I am his wife, Jael. Can I help you?"*

"Maybe," said Barak. *"The Lord has delivered Commander Sisera and his army into the hands of Israel, and we are looking for Sisera. I have reason to believe he may have escaped and passed through here not long ago."*

Jael put down her work and said, *"Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking."*

Barak and Deborah followed her into one of the tents. They looked down, and there on the ground was Sisera. A foot long metal tent peg had been hammered through his skull.

As they took in the view, Jael said, *"I know my husband was on friendly terms with King Jabin, but I still didn't like this Sisera. I had heard the stories of him and his men, how they loved young virgins and trafficked them in Canaan. He came to me about an hour ago looking for shelter. He was soaking wet and scared senseless. He asked if I could hide him. So... I told him he could rest here. He asked for some water, but I had just milked the goats and had warm milk. I knew it would help him sleep."*

Barak and Deborah watched her as she described what happened next.

"After I knew he was asleep, I took a tent peg and mallet and nailed his sorry head to the ground. Serves him right!"

Barak and Deborah left the tent. They made their way back to the army, who, by this time, were piling up dead bodies and plunder into a large heap.

Deborah said, *"Barak, the Lord commanded through Moses and Joshua that we are not to take any spoil but to totally destroy everything."*

Barak responded, *"Yes, and I reiterated to the men last night that when the Lord gives the victory, we will pile up the enemy and burn them as an offering devoted to the Lord for destruction."*

"Good!" said Deborah, *"and may their idols burn with them!"*

Barak turned and smiled at Deborah. *"You know,"* he said, *"it's not an accident your father named you honey bee."*

"Why do you say that?" asked Deborah, afraid to know the answer.

"You remind me of a queen bee." Deborah looked down as Barak continued: *"You keep bees. Surely know you what I mean."*

"I don't much like the title of queen," she said sternly, *"We have a king; his name is Yahweh. I will not steal glory from him."*

"I know that," said Barak, *"but look at these men working together."*

The two watched as Israelites hugged each other and laughed over the stories of battle. Barak continued, *"Look at them. Do you realize there are a mixture of five tribes who fought today? I counted Ephraim, Benjamin, Zebulun, Issachar, and Naphtali. And not only that, we had elders and leaders, rich and poor, young and old to join in the battle. Not since Joshua led Israel into this land have we had such community and cooperation. Thanks to you, Deborah, the country is uniting. There's still work to be done, to be sure, but Jabin is crippled. I'll lead the northern tribes, and we'll finish him off and regain the land that was taken."*

"Good," said Deborah, *"but tonight, let us gather back on Mount Tabor and celebrate a feast to the Lord. I feel the Spirit of God already leading me to write a psalm for the occasion."*

"A marvelous idea!" responded Barak.

Scene 8

That evening, Deborah and Barak assembled on the top of Mount Tabor. Many of the local men's wives had come and were preparing meals: roasted lamb, cakes of dates and raisins, fresh bread drenched in olive oil, and fruits by the basketful.

While Deborah was eating, a familiar face appeared through the fire light. It was Perez, who was no longer in grief. On the contrary, he was jubilant.

"Perez," Deborah said as she stood up, *"What a surprise."*

Perez bowed his head and said, *"I joined the battle today. Word came to me late, but I and some men from my tribe stormed to Haroseth-hagoyim as Sisera and his men were heading off to battle. And... well... what I wanted to show you..."* and with that he pulled into the fire light his wife and his daughter, Rebecca.

Deborah couldn't hold back the tears. *"This is your dear daughter, Rebecca! Come here child."*

Deborah embraced the young girl and asked, *"Are you okay? Did Sisera or his men harm you in any way?"*

"No ma'am," answered the girl. "Many of my friends and I were put in a prison for a few days, but we were fine. And then my daddy showed up this morning, busted into the prison, and freed us all."

Deborah hugged the girl again and said, *"Praise be to El Shaddai! Bless you, my child."*

The couple thanked Deborah again before assimilating with the crowd.

When everyone had eaten and was satisfied, Barak stood up in their midst and called out: *"Blessed be the name of the Lord!"*

And the crowd responded, *"Amen, blessed be his name!"*

"Now," continued Barak, "By the direction of the Spirit of the Lord, Deborah has written a song of praise for us to learn and sing."

Barak sat, and Deborah gracefully stood. She held a parchment that contained her song, but she didn't need it. The Spirit had helped her compose it, and she had already committed it to heart.

Deborah opened her mouth and sang...

Judges 5:1-31