Lesson 5: Deborah, a Mother in Israel…
Judges 4:1-5:31

Two beginnings and two endings with seven judges on a seesaw in between and Gideon in the middle.

That is the structure of the Book of Judges. Over the last four weeks, I have repeated that phrase several times. The reason I’ve done that is because I wanted to try to put into your minds, in a visual sort of way, the design of the Book. I wanted to do that so you might begin to see its design so you could get a sense of its genius and its message.

You see the book of Judges was written among other reasons to show God’s people their need for a righteous king.¹ It was written to show them that unless they followed their righteous king, and I personally think that meant the legendary King David, that they were going to be subject to continued judgment and defeat at the hands of their enemies…that God would used the despised inhabitants of the land of Canaan to punish their disobedience.
Now the way the author of Judges works that message out is by relating selected stories that demonstrate the repeated cycle...almost the inevitability...of their sin and their consequent oppression and their ultimate deliverance.

To say it another way, the author uses stories to show how the nation’s disobedience brought them into oppression and then how God, through the sending of brave warrior-like judges, delivered them only to have them fall into the same cycle all over again after that particular delivering judge died.

Now this morning, we have come to the third major story in the book...the story of Deborah and Barak. You can tell, I think, by looking at the slide that we are almost to the halfway point of Judges at least in terms of the characters. That is true even though we are only in chapter four. Now I have said repeatedly that the first few judges are mostly positive...and that after Gideon things start going downhill. Still, we haven’t got that far yet. Deborah’s story is positive...mostly positive. There are a few disappointments in the story...a few twists and turns that are unexpected. But on the whole, it is positive.
Now if you’ll open your Bibles to Judges chapter four, we’ll start in at verse one.

**NIV Judges 4:1**...After Ehud died, the Israelites once again did evil in the eyes of the LORD.

Now the first thing we see is the same old cycle of sin and failure all over again. As soon as Ehud died the Israelites fell back into idolatry and intermingling with the Canaanites. That means that among other things they had turned back to worship the Asherahs and the Baals. Verse two then relates how God determined to judge their sin.

**NIV Judges 4:2**...So the LORD sold them into the hands of Jabin, a king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor.

Now the interesting thing about verse two is that it tells us who God used to oppress the Israelites. The man God used was Jabin, king of Canaan, a man who ruled and reigned in Hazor. But the really strange thing about Jabin is that he is really sort of incidental to the story. That is, he is not a very important character in the story. He is introduced...his title is given...the location of his throne is given and then he more or less drops out of the story. It seems to me that he is only
introduced just to get us to the real villain in the story…a villain who is not actually mentioned until the next verse.

Now I ought to tell you that modern scholars have a field day with this character Jabin and with the mention of the town of Hazor. They have a field day with it because they think it proves the author of Judges was confused…that he got his stories mixed up.

The reason they think that is because earlier in Joshua, the Bible tells us that Joshua killed Jabin and destroyed and burned Hazor. You can read about yourself in Joshua 11. Anyway, what they say is something like this, “Now see the writer to Judges got his stories mixed up. He started off writing about one battle and got it confused with another. So don’t put too much stock in the historiography of the Bible.”

But I don’t think it is necessary to have such a low view of inspiration. I think it simply means that Hazor was rebuilt and that the King of Hazor mentioned here was almost certainly a descendant of the Jabin that Joshua had battled. Anyway, Jabin is a relatively minor character in the story. The real antagonist is named Sisera. He’s mentioned in the second half of verse 2.

NIV Judges 4:2…The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth Haggoyim. Because he had nine hundred iron chariots and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the LORD for help.
Now the name Sisera is an unusual name. Scholars are pretty sure that he was probably a foreigner to Canaan...more than likely a foreign mercenary. But if he was, he was a big-time mercenary. I say that because he had 900 chariots made of iron and he lived not in the same town where Jabin the King lived but in a separate town...in his own place...a place called Harosheth Haggoyim.

I ought to tell you many modern scholars think that 900 chariots is an exaggerated number.\(^4\) They think the author exaggerated the number to make the story more epic. But I don’t think that. I think the reason the author used the number 900 is because Sisera possessed somewhere between 899 and 901 chariots. In fact, there is a battle recorded by an ancient Egyptian Pharaoh named Thutmose in almost this exact same area in which he mentions that he captured as spoils some 924 chariots made of iron. I think it is strange that some Bible scholars have no trouble accepting that someone actually had 900 chariots as long as they are not mentioned in the Bible.

Anyway, the story says that Sisera possessed 900 iron chariots and that he bitterly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years. Now the reason that chariots were so formidable ought to be obvious. They were drawn by horses and were thus very
fast. They were able to simply roll over infantry lines. They were able to encircle and attack from almost any direction. They were able to move and to attack in ways that long lines of soldiers could not. They were the ancient equivalent of tanks...each usually with a driver and an archer or a spearman.

The one disadvantage that chariots had is that they were not very good on rough terrain or in mud or in areas where there were a lot of trees. But on level ground out in the open, they were just about unstoppable.

Now in verse 4, we are introduced for the first time to Deborah...the prophetess.

NIV Judges 4:4...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.

Now it seems to me that she is introduced differently than almost all the other judges in the book of Judges. She is introduced as a prophetess rather than a judge and she is said to have held court or assembly under a palm tree between Ramah and Bethel in Ephraim. Now I think that tells us two things. First, she was acting as an arbiter in disputes between the people of Israel. That means that her
influence extended beyond her own tribe of Ephraim and secondly she was not involved principally as a deliverer...that is, as a military conqueror.

No, she is principally involved in giving the Word of the Lord to the people. Now that tells us, inadvertently I think, about the status of the priesthood at the time. You see the priesthood had been gifted by God with the possession of the Urim and Thummin which were used somehow to determine God’s will. In the days of Deborah, however, the priesthood was apparently not receiving any word from God while Deborah was

It is hard to know exactly why that was the case but I think the pattern of the book of Judges probably gives us a pretty good idea. It was probably because the priesthood had become corrupt. I suspect that God circumvented the priesthood and spoke rather a covenantally faithful Israelite…the prophetess, Deborah.

In verse six, we see that she received a special word from God…a word that was to be passed on…a word directed toward a man named Barak…a man of the tribe of Naphtali some 40 to 50 miles to the north.

NIV Judges 4:6...She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you...
Now the content of the command God had Deborah give to Barak is contained verses six and seven. Notice how clear the command is. Notice that it contains how many people Barak is to call out, where they are to come from, where they are to go and ultimately even what they were to accomplish.

_NIV_ Judges 4:6…’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.’"

You see the Lord commanded Barak to gather his army, go up to Mt. Tabor which is about 1,900 feet high (Here’s a modern picture of Mt. Tabor) and wait for the Lord to bring Sisera to him. At some point Barak was to race down the mountain with his men and attack Sisera in the Wadi Kishon which is a stream or river draining the Valley of Jezreel and dumping into the Mediterranean at the modern port of Haifa.
Now the important thing to remember is that this word to Barak was a word directly from the Lord delivered to him through the prophetess Deborah.

But…and this should probably not be surprising to the story…Barak is hesitant to act. That comes across fairly clearly in verse 8.

NIV Judges 4:8…Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go."

Now that was Bark’s way I think of saying that he wanted the continued assurance of the word of God…that is, he wanted the assurance of having access to God and to instruction from God along the way and he thought he could have that as long as Deborah was with him. I can understand his point of view. But Deborah makes the point equally clear that one word from God should have been enough.

NIV Judges 4:9…"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, where he summoned Zebulun and Naphtali. Ten thousand men followed him, and Deborah also went with him.
Now I want you to notice the promise Deborah makes Barak. She promises him that she will indeed go with him but she also lets him know that because of the way he responded the honor would not fall to him but to a woman.

Now if you were reading this story for the first time, and some of you may be, you may think that the woman that will get the honor of the victory will be Deborah herself. But that is not how the story turns out...the story has a wonderful twist...a wonderfully ironic twist.

Now let me sum up what we have learned so far. So far, we have learned that there was a Canaanite King named Jabin who was treading hard on the Israelites. We have also learned that the story is not really about Jabin but rather about his general...his second in command...Sisera, the head of the army used by Jabin to oppress the people of God. Now this man Sisera was an enemy of God’s people...and hence, an enemy of God and that is true even though he was being used by God to force the Israelites back toward repentance.

Now from the perspective of the Israelites the story seems to start off with the prophetess Deborah but the story is not really about her, it’s about her second in command a man named Barak who she directs on the basis of a word from God to go and fight against Sisera and his army. So in a sense, the story in Judges chapter 4 is about two number twos...two second in commands.

But we also know already is that somehow Barak, who looks for a moment like he is going to be the principal hero in the story, is going to be deprived of the glory that he would have gained in defeating this enemy, this enemy Sisera, because he failed to respond in faith to Deborah’s message.
Now I don’t want to be too hard on Barak. I don’t want to paint him too differently than he is painted in Hebrews.

**NIV Hebrews 11:32**...And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, 
33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 
34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.

Barak was a hero. He was a man of faith...but a man of imperfect faith. That is, he was very much like you and I.

Now the story has been funneling down especially in terms of the characters that are being mentioned. Here’s what I mean by that. The writer introduces Jabin and Deborah…but then turns from them to their seconds. Still, he is not through funneling downward toward still another character. You see in verse 11 he is going to introduce still another character.

**NIV Judges 4:11**...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.

Now the man introduced is named Heber. He is a Kenite, a descendant of Hobab, the brother of Moses’ wife Zipporah. The Kenites are first introduced to us in the Book of Numbers.

**NIV Numbers 10:29**...Now Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses’ father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place about which the LORD said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us and we will treat you well, for the LORD has promised good things to Israel." 
30 He answered, "No, I will not go; I am going
back to my own land and my own people."  31 But Moses said, "Please do not leave us. You know where we should camp in the desert, and you can be our eyes.  32 If you come with us, we will share with you whatever good things the LORD gives us."

Now the Kenites were not Israelites...they were distant relatives but not Israelites and they lived in the midst of God’s people. You can tell that from the phrase that says that Heber pitched his tent in Kedesh. Kedesh was also the area where Barak lived.

Now in verse 12, Sisera finds out about Barak and his men and goes up to meet him at Mt. Tabor.

_NIV_ Judges 4:12...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 (The Forested Highlands of the Pagans) to the Kishon River.

In verse 14, Barak receives a word of confirmation through Deborah to attack. The word that she gives Barak is that God has already delivered Sisera and his men into their hands.

_NIV_ Judges 4:14...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.

Now you ought to notice that not much detail is given about the battle. The text doesn’t tell us how Barak managed to beat Sisera and his nine hundred chariots.
All is says is that Sisera and army were routed and some of them, especially Sisera, abandoned their chariots and fled on foot and that Barak chased them down the face of the mountain all the way back to Harosheth Haggoyim.

Now in verse 17, the author of Judges is going to funnel down one more time in the story until at least he reaches the heroine of the story...a woman named Jael. Look at verse 17.

NIV Judges 4:17...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. Sisera was running for his life. He had lost his army and his chariot and his only thought is to simply try to survive the day. Jael...the wife of Heber the Kenite...offered to help him by hiding him.

NIV Judges 4:18...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. 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.'" 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.

At last, we meet the woman who is going to get the glory for defeating Sisera the enemy of God’s people. Now here is the interesting thing about Jael. Not only is she a woman...she is a woman who happens not to be an Israelite. She is the one who gets the glory for delivering the nation...not Barak...not even Deborah...and the point is...that it is really God who gets the glory. The deliverance of the nation is never to be attributed to their brave warriors or even their prophets...it is always
to be attributed to their God and if there is any doubt about that...the story of Jael makes the point nicely...God can use anybody to accomplish His purpose." 

Now in verse 22 Jael explains to Barak what she has done. Verse 23 gives a theological interpretation of the days events.

**NIV Judges 4:22**...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. 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.

Now it is appropriate that Barak should be shown Sisera’s body by Jael. It would have confirmed to him the prophetic word spoken by Deborah and it would have caused him to realize that the deliverance was the Lord’s doing and not his own. 

However, it does not appear that Barak was much of a pouter because starting in chapter five, the author of Judges relates a song written by Deborah and sung by Deborah and Barak to the nation. I have to tell you I never really appreciated this particular literary device until I realized it is one of those heroic epic songs sung at the end of a great battle...much like in the movie *The Lord of the Rings*. I am not saying that *Lord of the Rings* helped me interpret the Bible...I’m just saying that I hadn’t adequately realized the loveliness of this sort of literary device in and of itself. It is not the kind of thing we do today.

Now the song itself starts off with an appeal for the nations to listen to their praise of God and then they present God as a mighty warrior marching up out of the
desert bringing rain and thunder and lightning with him. Look at verse one through five.

**NIV Judges 5:1...**On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song: 2 "When the princes in Israel take the lead, when the people willingly offer themselves-- praise the LORD! 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. 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.

And I have to tell you I think the rain and the storms mentioned in verses three through five explain how it was the Barak was able to defeat Sisera and his army so completely. I think an unusual summer storm blew in and the rain made mud that made it impossible for Sisera to properly utilize his chariots. Listen to what one commentator writes:

The flood that resulted from the rain made it impossible for the Canaanites to use their horses and chariots effectively (cf. Exod. 14:25).

In all probability, we have to think of a terrible storm, with thunder and lightening and hail, or the sudden bursting of a cloud, which is poetically described as though the stars of heaven had left their courses to fight for the Lord and His kingdom upon earth.

Since Baal was the storm god, Deborah was glorifying Yahweh over Baal in what she said here.

And another writes this:

The last passage mentions God’s thunder (cf. also Josh 10:10-11); and Deborah’s song (5:20-21) shows that a sudden downpour overwhelmed Sisera’s chariots, as
the swelling river turned the ground to mud that clogged the wheels. Deborah may have pointed to the gathering storm clouds as she sent Barak into battle.¹²

Now in verses six through twenty three the song Deborah and Barak are singing describes Israel’s oppression and the fact that they had no weapons. Then it poetically relates which tribes participated in the battle and which did not. In verse 23, there is another reference to a flood and floodwaters which swept the enemy away and it may be poetic or it may another reference to the rains God sent to hinder Sisera and his chariots¹³.

NIV Judges 5:6…"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. 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. ⁹ My heart is with Israel’s princes, with the willing volunteers among the people. Praise the LORD! 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. 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. 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. 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. ¹⁸ The people of Zebulun risked their very lives; so did Naphtali on the heights of the field. 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. 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. 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.'

Verse 24 finally praises Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, for killing Sisera and I have to tell you the commentators are very rough on poor old Jael. They criticize her for her lack of hospitality and for her treachery. But I think that is wrong. She sided with God’s people…which means she sided with God. I think the criticisms leveled against her are just another example of modern political correctness…another example of trying to apply our twenty-first century morals and scruples to an ancient situation and that just doesn’t work. The song here is wonderfully poetic and wonderfully violent. Look at verse 24.

NIV Judges 5:24…"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. 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.

Now in verse 28, the scene changes…it changes to a window where Sisera’s mother is waiting for him to come home victorious from battle. I don’t necessarily think the idea was to give a strict historical account of what Sisera’s mother said. It may be that the idea is simply figurative…that the writer was poetically imagining that Sisera’s mother was wondering what was taking him so long. Either way, the passage is be viewed as a just end for all those that oppose God…and of course, it is deeply ironic…Sisera’s mother is imagining that Sisera is gathering all sorts of colorful garments as plunder when in fact he lays dead in
Jael’s tent went a tent peg through his skull. The only colorful garments Sisera knows are those stained with his own blood.15

NIV Judges 5:28... "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?'

Verse 31, concludes the song with a chorus calling for the same end for all of God’s enemies.

NIV Judges 5:31..."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.”

Now what are we to conclude at the end of this section?

I think we are to conclude that God will accomplish the deliverance of His people through His appointed means...that He is not bound up by their obedience or even their faith...that He can use the most extraordinary and surprising things to accomplish His end...and that He will do so that He will not have to share His glory with another.

No place was that more true than in the redemptive work of Christ.

May it be so now and forevermore, world without end. Amen.

2 Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Judges* in the BST Series edited by J.A. Moyter (Downer’s Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 52. He writes: “We remind ourselves that it is the Lord who raises up both, at this and every other critical point in the book. It is no accident that, as we have seen, Judges portrays the wickedness of Israel as desperately unoriginal — it varies only in that it gets worse — while the Lord’s ways of dealing with it are endlessly resourceful.”

3 Herbert Wolf, *Judges* in the Expositor’s Bible Commentary: with the New International Version of the Holy Bible: Deuteronomy - 2 Samuel edited by Frank E. Gaebelein (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1992), 4:2. “Joshua had defeated a Jabin king of Hazor, who had been the leader of the powerful northern coalition (Josh 11:1-11), and the Israelites had burned the city. Some scholars believe that chapters 4-5 are another version of that battle. Yet it is not unusual for several kings to use a dynastic name like ”Jabin” (cf. K. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* [Chicago: InterVarsity, 1966], p. 68).”


5 John Marshall Lang & Thomas Kirk, *Studies in the Book of Judges*, (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock Publishers, 1983), 39. They write, “She was a prophetess. To another woman in early Israelite history this lofty title is attached. That woman was Miriam, the sister of Moses. But Miriam did not judge or rule. On one occasion she is joined with Aaron in revolt against Moses and was punished for this prominence by being smitten with leprosy. And although, after the passage through the Red Sea, Miriam led the daughters of Israel in singing the Triumphal Hymn, the hymn was not the product of her mind, it was the Song of Moses. To Deborah, therefore, who herself sat in the seat of Moses, and whose song was the outburst of her own enthusiasm, belongs the higher place. Similarly, she is distinguished from other women who, in Holy Scripture, are represented as partakers of prophetic gifts. She is a unique figure in the annals of the chosen people. With one exception, she is the only female ruler mentioned in these annals. Her hymn is a splendid expression of thought and feeling stirred into the most intense energy and conveyed in purest rhythmic form.”

6 Gale A. Yee, “By the Hand of a Woman: The Metaphor of the Woman Warrior in Judges 4” in *Semeia* no. 61 1993, 112. “Women would have been able to theorize their own military strategies in the immediacy of war that characterized their time. Because of women’s already strong position in the household and their kinship/residential connections with the ‘eleph or the mishpahâ in arms (Gottwald: 270-76), men in pre-monarchic Israel would have been more willing to accept and trust their leadership in warfare than a group of strangers (cf. McLaughlin: 203). They would not necessarily have regarded women as usurping positions in “their” domain, because the boundaries between the domestic and public domains were fluid.

Having presented the social conditions that permitted women’s leadership to emerge during war, I still stress, however, that their leadership was not the norm in pre-monarchic Israel. Otherwise, one might expect that many more examples like that of Deborah would have been recorded. The woman warrior was a liminal figure. Her leadership in war was one response to emergency situations of conflict which were prevalent in Israel during the time of the Judges. It was permissible because the lines between domestic and public domains were flexible. The sudden confusion of gender roles in such anomalous situations during war was only temporary; it was assumed that when the emergency had passed women would return to their ordinary occupations.
(cf. McLaughlin 196-197)."

7 Wolf, 4:8. “In response to the challenge, Barak expressed his willingness to go, but only if Deborah accompanied him (v. 8). Her presence as a prophetess would assure contact with the Lord, just as the presence of Moses and the ark of the covenant brought victory in battle (Num 10:35) while their absence meant defeat (Num 14:44).”

8 Vincent, Mark A., “The Song of Deborah : A Structural and Literary Consideration” in Journal for the Study of the Old Testament no 91 D 2000, p 61-82. Most modern journal articles have a distinctively feminist perspective and perhaps see more than the text allows. “Both our heroines are contrasted with Sisera’s mother, the object of cruel mocking in the poem’s last stanza, Deborah, the mother in Israel who achieves honor and victory is contrasted with the mother of Sisera who loses her son. Jael was originally part of the same league as the mother of Sisera but how different their life. Both are portrayed in relation to Sisera; one is his slayer, the other is to be his mourner. Jael, one of the tent-dwelling women triumphs over Sisera, the man of the battlefield; meanwhile his mother stays in the city in ignorance of what is taking place. Sisera, the would-be spoiler of women (out at the mouth of his own mother!) is seen utterly spoiled as he falls between the legs of Jael. The sexual overtone of the language is not difficult to spot. This scene of Jael and Sisera in the tent is presented with consummate artistry as has been pointed out before.”

9 A.R. Fausset, A Critical and Expository Commentary on the Book of Judges, (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999 reprint of 1885 work published by James Nisbet and Co., London), 83. Fausset writes, “Barak thus, as Deborah had foretold (ver. 9), was too late to win the crowning honor of the victory by slaying Sisera: a woman had forestalled him.”

10 Soggin, 76. Soggin agrees with the idea that there was a weather miracle but does not want to be too specific. He writes: “That here too we have some sort of weather miracle, as we shall see in 5:20, seems proved by the fact that Sisera is forced to flee on foot, abandoning the very vehicle whose speed gave him and advantage when facing the enemy, his chariot now made useless because eit was bogged down in the mud.”

11 Dr. Constable, 38.

12 Wolf 5:21-22.

13 Leon Wood, Distressing Days of the Judges, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1975), 192. Wood writes, “The main reason for Israel’s triumph, which ensued, was not surprise, however, but it was God’s timing of a storm which flooded the Kishon. Deborah describes the matter with these words, They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon” (Judg. 5:20, 21).

This flooding made Sisera’s chariots suddenly more a hindrance than a help. Deborah continues significantly to say. “Then were the horsehoofs broken by the means of the prancings, the prancings of their mighty Ones” (Judg. 5:22). The meaning is best taken to be that the horses, pulling the chariots, broke ranks as the chariots became stalled in the mud, and, with wild prancings, galloped away from the helpless drivers. This put the enemy in complete disarray, and God’s army won a remarkable victory, Barak’s troops pursued the fleeing enemy all the way to their home base in Haroseth, and they succeeded in slaying the fleeing men until “there was not a man left” (Judg. 4: 6).”
14 Alberto Soggin, *When the Judges Ruled* (New York: Association Press, 1965), 43. Listen for example to Soggin, “Our story ends with a brutal episode. Sisera, the commander of the Canaanite alliance, defeated and a fugitive, is barbarously and treacherously killed. Jael, a member of the Kenite group which is in alliance with Israel, murders him in violation of all the rights of hospitality. The Israelite epic is still too near to the events to have made any revision of the events that it narrates. It lacks the centuries of reflection and of purification which have made of the Homeric epics the greatest in the world. There is no sign of any condemnation of the act; there is no sense of quiet and objective judgment. There is not a trace of the chivalrous, or to use a modern term, sporting outlook, which recognizes and honors the honorable enemy, and condemns every infringement of his rights. Our text simply expresses the sense of triumph in the victory that has been won, and over the enemy who has been slain. These are the only things that interest Israel; no other consideration enters into the picture. For the victory Israel renders praise to its Lord with primitive faith and rough enthusiasm.”