

Jael: An Example of Christian Warfare

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Jael lived during the era of the judges. Deborah the prophetess was the judge who served Israel at the time of Jael. During this time, the Canaanites under the rule of king Jabin had risen to power in the north of Canaan. For twenty years, Jabin and Sisera, the captain of Jabin's powerful army, oppressed the northern tribes of Israel. Deborah enlisted the help of a man named Barak to lead the armies of Israel against Sisera and his host. Though Barak balked at her request to help, this does not mean that Barak was a coward. In fact, Hebrews 11:32 lists him among the witnesses of faith. After all, it was no little feat to go to battle against an army that far outnumbered your own. Barak's army consisted of only ten thousand footmen. That was small compared to Sisera's army that included nine hundred iron-clad chariots and a whole host of men from the regions north of Canaan.

Part of the reason Barak's army was so small was that men out of various tribes of Israel refused to fight. Only men out of Zebulun, Naphtali, and Issachar answered the call to take up arms. Dan and Asher refused. We also learn that the angel of the Lord later cursed Meroz, a village of Israel through which Sisera fled and the inhabitants did nothing to stop him. They just watched him flee through their city. This reflects the low spiritual state of Israel at this time.

All the events summarized above led up to what occurred in the tent of a woman named Jael. Jael lived in a large tent with her husband, Heber. Heber and his wife were Kenites, descendants of Jethro the father-in-law to Moses. Heber had moved away from the rest of the Kenites, living far away in the north of Canaan. We are not told why, but there was peace between Jabin the king of the Canaanites and the household of Heber. This is why we find Sisera freely entering into the tent of Heber.

During his battle with Deborah and Barak, Sisera saw that the army of Israel under God's sovereign direction was destroying his forces. Seeing that the battle was against him, Sisera stole away from his army and ran alone in a different direction that eventually led him to the tent of Jael. When Sisera appeared in the door of Jael's tent, she acted calmly and welcomed Sisera into her home. Since Sisera had been fleeing for hours, he was hungry and weary. No doubt this wary soldier was also providentially guided by God through his need to eat and sleep in safety from the Israelite army. Jael fed him milk and butter, prepared him a bed, then covered him to sleep, reassuring him that she would keep close watch by the door of the tent. Sisera fell asleep soundly on his side.

Sisera was so soundly asleep that he did not notice Jael leaving the tent to fetch a tent stake. Her tent was a large one that required long, thick stakes to hold it in place. Stake in hand, Jael quietly

approached Sisera, held the stake at his temple, and drove it through his head into the ground. This was a quick and easy death from a woman who had no other weapon on hand and could not afford to wound a capable soldier who would fight back if he could. So she quickly drove the spike through his brain, and he died immediately.

This act of Jael may seem gruesome. To fasten a man's head to the ground by means of a large stake through his temples! Yet we learn that this was an act of great faith. Jael had cast in her lot with Israel, the people of God. When the people of Israel refused to fight and even let Sisera flee through their midst, this woman fought the good fight of faith. God had by his grace grafted her into the Messiah who was yet to be born. She believed that Jehovah was her God. She knew what it was to be a part of the covenant that God had established with Israel. Through faith, therefore, she entered into the battle with boldness and confidence. For this single act she was declared blessed by Deborah in her song recorded in Judges 5. And because of her action, she becomes for us today a godly example of faith and daring. Jael entered into warfare with the enemies of God and his church!

Though today we do not fight the same sort of physical warfare as Jael, we nevertheless still fight through means of spiritual battle. Young men and women of God's covenant, how are we doing in our spiritual warfare? There is a battle being waged in our lives too, you realize. Satan has his sights set on destroying the church of Christ in this world. His aim is singularly focused on obliterating our love for God's covenant and church! Satan seeks to destroy the church by plundering, robbing, and raping God's saints of the truth of God's word. Perhaps Satan may not frighten us like the physically brutish Sisera, but he should! He is ruthless! He uses every battle tactic to annihilate the church of Christ and to exterminate our love for God and his church. He takes aim at the doctrines of the church in order to ruin them and turn God's people from the faith. He seeks to quench the fervent love for Jesus Christ and the work of salvation. He seeks to divide the church with the lie, causing division and strife.

Ah yes, divide and conquer! Satan knows the best ways of doing this. He seeks to ruin the covenant line of the church by destroying marriages and families. This chief foe of the church has a whole army behind him. He is the prince of the power of the world! One of his allies is the wicked world around us. The most effective weapon he uses against the church is prosperity. This means that you and I are the objects of his fiercest attacks. He sends the world into the church via social media, through writing, through movies, and through the internet to make the ways of the wicked world so alluring! The world begins to influence us in the way we think and react to sin. As a result, the sinful hatred, resentment, the distrust of the world infiltrates the church and destroys her too.

But Satan and the world are not alone in their assault upon the church. We also fight our sinful flesh. This means that I am my own worst enemy! I have to fight the lust in me that is so attracted to the sinful ways of the world. While the world slowly kills the families of the church by its pernicious ways, we stand by admiring its alluring evils and submitting to their temptation.

Because of our weak and sinful nature, we become calloused to the evil that is so present around us, failing to fight it like the citizens of Meroz who gave free pass to Jabin and Sisera.

The battle cry goes out to you, young Christian soldiers: to arms! Fight the good fight of faith!

Do we stumble and falter when battle is near? Do we sit back and refuse to fight our mighty, overwhelming enemies? Do we refuse to love God's covenant and walk in his fear? Look at Jael and follow her example. Do not give in to the reasoning and lifestyle of the unbelieving world. Use God's word as your sure defense to discern what is truth versus the lie. God's word must go before us to battle the sin that so easily besets us. Out of love for God and his church, we throw ourselves into the fray of the spiritual battle we must fight.

Do not fear to drive the tent spike of God's word through the head of the serpent against whom we fight. Maybe that means driving the stake through our cell phones or the movies that possess us. Maybe it means lopping the head off our incessant drive for pleasure and the treasures of this world. Through prayer we seek forgiveness for our failures, then endeavor to live a life of thankfulness. What a wonderful example of Christian warfare Jael provides us. You too are men and women of faith. Hold high the banner of Christ as you fight the good fight of faith!

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