

✓ This is not the only place in scripture where this passage resonates. Judges 5 is very similar to Exodus 15. Both passages follow the same pattern. Judges 4 and Exodus 14 tell a story of deliverance in the form of a narrative. In each case, the chapter that follows retells the story as a poem. The language of both is similar, both feature overflowing water, Both use creational language. Both feature God breaking into a situation of oppression and destroying the enemy. The narrative focuses on the people and the events, the poem focuses on the power of God.

The story is not just about the defeat of Jabin, it is about overthrowing oppression.

When God does something great we should celebrate.

**How are we going to do this?**

? **Why did the people hang back?** Judges 5:7  
**What did Deborah do?**

**What does it mean by new leadership?** Judges 5:8

\* **Read Judges 5:2, 5:9**  
**What is the theme of the poem?**

**Who went willingly in the story?**

Deborah  
Barak  
The people  
Jael

**According to the poem who did not go willingly?** Judges 5:13-18.

Remember Israel is a tribal federation, there is no formal central control. The poem gives a list of the tribes who went out to battle with Barak and Deborah and those who chose not to. By answering the call, the tribes that went risked their lives 5:18.

**Why did Benjamin, Issachar and Zebulun come willingly?**

**Why did only some of Ephraim come?**

Dan and Reuben did not come. Twice we are told that Reuben did not come after much searching of heart. 15,16

? **What does this imply?**  
**What was the argument for going?**  
**What was the argument for staying away?**

- This is a narrative that describes team. Deborah, Barak, Jael and the army all have to co-operate in order for the victory to be won. Now we are told others do not put their weight behind the mission.

? **What point is being made?**  
**How does this apply in church life?**  
**What attitude are we being asked to model?**  
**Do we need to be involved in everything?**  
**How will we know?**

♥ In modern Hebrew the word used to go willingly in Judges means to Volunteer.  
**Where do you need to volunteer?**

*Then the land had peace forty years. Judges 5:31*

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# FREEDOM

## Christian Church

### Jael and the Tent Peg

✓ The Israelites have been oppressed by the Canaanites for 20 years. Deborah the judge and prophet has instructed Barak to raise an army and defeat Jabin the king that has been oppressing them. Barak is initially reticent, because of this Deborah prophesies that a woman will take the honour of the battle. Jabin forces were much superior, but because of God's help, Barak prevails. Sisera the commander of Jabin's army has deserted his chariot and is looking for a way to escape.

▶ **Jael**  
**Judges 4:17-20**

The Kenites are Canaanite, but they like many of the Canaanites, especially poor among them, have sided with the Israel, Judges 1:16. The Kenites have a long association with Judah. Israel is a tribal federation and this oppression and deliverance happen in the North., Judah is not involved. Heber and his family have moved North and has entered an alliance with Jabin Judges 4:11. He may even be fighting with Sisera. The name Heber in Hebrew means friend. It is the word used not of someone you like, but of someone you are in alliance with. The question is whose Heber will he be?

- Heber's family have ties to both sides of the battle. Verse 17 suggests that Sisera thinks he will be safe in Jael's tent.

? **Why does Heber not appear in this narrative?**  
**Was it a good thing for Sisera to enter the tent of another man's wife when he was not present?**

**Is Jael safe in these circumstances?**  
**What dangers might she face?**

When we answer a question like that we do so from our own moral understanding. But at this period it would be a serious breach of manners. Sisera is desperate. Any port in a storm. However, the account is full of sexual innuendo. Chapter 5 speaks openly about Sisera's army and Sisera himself, raping those on the losing side. As it still is, rape was considered a weapon of war. Jael would be justified in thinking herself in danger.

2 **Jael invites him in.**  
**What are the next two things she does?**

She tucks him in and gives him milk to drink.  
**What does this sound like?**

Deborah is described as a "mother in Israel" it turns out that Jael is too. She, however, is a very different kind of mother.



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*'Stand in the doorway of the tent,' he told her. 'If someone comes and asks you, "Is anyone in there?" say "No." Judges 4:20*



**Does he ask Jael to hide him or just assume that she will?**

**What is Sisera trying to achieve?**

**What position is he putting Jael in?**

**Was this reasonable?**

Judges is famed for its humour and irony. The Hebrew of this verse translated literally, *if someone comes and asks you is there a man inside answer no*. The suggestion is that Sisera is not a man, he is portrayed as a child and he is hiding expecting Jael to protect him. What is more, (spoiler alert) in a moment there will not be a "man" inside.



**Read Judges 4:21-23**

**What did Jael do?**

**What do you think of this?**

It is widely held that, in stark contrast to today, women maintained and put up tents in ancient Israel. A hammer and tent peg were tools she was familiar with and had to hand. Again there is perhaps sexual imagery here. Someone commented that she, "rapes the rapist."

At the beginning of this account, we are uncertain which side the Kenites will be on. By her actions, Jael tells us what side she is on.

**Why do you think she makes this choice?**

**In what ways did Sisera miss-read the situation?**



In contrast, Jael reads the situation very well. If Sisera is fleeing then the battle is a total loss. If her husband was fighting with Sisera, then he is either dead or in grave danger. Even if her family have been on the Canaanite side, then her actions now will protect not only her, but also the life of her husband. She works this all out without ever giving Sisera any idea of what she is thinking. It is possible she is switching sides for the whole family, all be it out of self preservation.

Modern commentators are divided on Jael. Many consider her actions evil because she breached the rules of ancient hospitality. This she did but Sisera did so first. She also killed a defenceless person.



**What do you think, was Jael a hero or a villain?**

**Did she go too far with this kind of violence?**

**What are the issues?**

**Was killing him in his sleep cowardly?**

**Is this an act of treachery?**

**What characteristics did she show?**

**What would have happened if she had been caught hiding him?**

**Does this passage justify murder?**

**What kind of women would you describe Jael as?**

The way she killed him was dramatic and violent.

**What questions might it raise for its readers especially those practising oppression?**



*Dear Sisera, et al.*

*Don't underestimate Jael, she is not the powerless, bit player that you think you can control. You might think she is there for your benefit, but she is smart enough to find a way to win in the end. She will do it in a way that you do not see coming. She is more intelligent, stronger and a better actor than you think. She is with God and God is with her. Mess with her at your peril.*

*Yours sincerely*

*The oppressed.*



Jael's options were very limited, she took the only opportunity she had and used what she had to hand. It is not an innocent man she kills and it is in the context of a battle. It is in fact a part of a battle. He posed a life-threatening risk to her in several ways. It is the oppression that she destroys.

The way that she killed him is a little like the way Ehud killed Eglon in the previous chapter.

The violence in here is frightening. However, it is not an unrestrained violence. It is a violence targeted against the oppressor and a real threat to her family.

**Is this kind of violence justified today?**



The issue here is the options that she had. In our society, there would be courses of action open to her that she did not have. In our society, these actions would be hard to justify because we could do other things to protect our safety. In wartime they would be much easier to justify.

**If she had smothered him with a blanket would you read the story differently?**



**Read Judges 5:25-27**

The poetry describes Sisera's death a little differently, it does not mention that he was asleep at the time, instead, it describes him as falling. There is not necessarily a contradiction her as 'falling' is the standard euphemism for a soldier dying in war.



**Barak**

Barak arrives at Jael's tent We assume he has intelligence as to where Sisera has taken refuge.

**What does Jael do?**

**What position did this put Jael in?**

**How do you think Barak felt?**

Deborah prophecy has come true. Sisera has died at the hand of a woman.

**Do you think Barak was in this for his own glory?**



Barak does not come across as the kind of person who would care, the oppression of the Canaanites has been broken. He and his men are alive and have good news to take home with them.

**What do you think Jael said to her Heber, her husband when he got home?**



**The Poem**

**Read Judges 5:24-27**

**How does the poem treat Jael?**

However the 21st century has evaluated Jael, the Bible treats her as a hero. She is most blessed of all women.

**Does this language sound familiar to you?**

You might have read a phrase like this in Luke 3 said of Mary Jesus mother. This is not accidental both poems address the same themes. The overthrow of the powerful and the exaltation of the weak. Jael triumphs over Sisera.



**Do you find the comparison with Mary strange?**

**Who benefits from it Jael or Mary?**