

1

(Series Overview Slide and Message Title)



2

Sometimes it is TIME TO DECIDE.

-- Our flip-flopping around won't do anymore.

-- Our weighing the issues and the odds has to stop.

TR: In a phrase that some use . . .



3

it is time to “Fish or cut bait”

- Though the phrase originally had to do with two important jobs, it has come to mean that it is time to decide NOW.**
- The phrase has also been shortened to “Cut bait” and run.**
- Meaning we stop doing what we are doing and move on.**

TR: What is it that God is fishing for as Jesus fishes for men and women, boys and girls?

Judges 5:2, 9

“That the **leaders took the lead** in Israel,
that the **people offered themselves**
willingly, bless the LORD!

My heart goes out to the commanders of
Israel who **offered themselves willingly**
among the people. Bless the LORD.

ESV

4

He is fishing for His followers who will live out these verses in the OT book of Judges . . . READ SLIDE

-- Whether leaders or followers or leader/followers like different level commanders . . . we all must decide.

-- And to not decide is to decide.

TR: Today we look a historical account that happened over 3000 years ago but is for us.

Romans 15:4

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

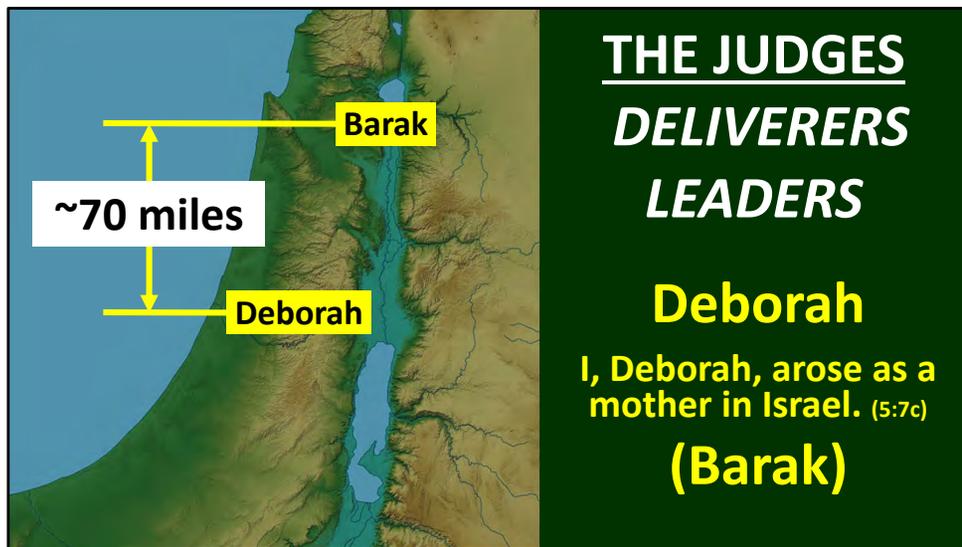
ESV

5

As we read in Romans . . . READ SLIDE

-- We need hope so we must receive the encouragement of the Scriptures.

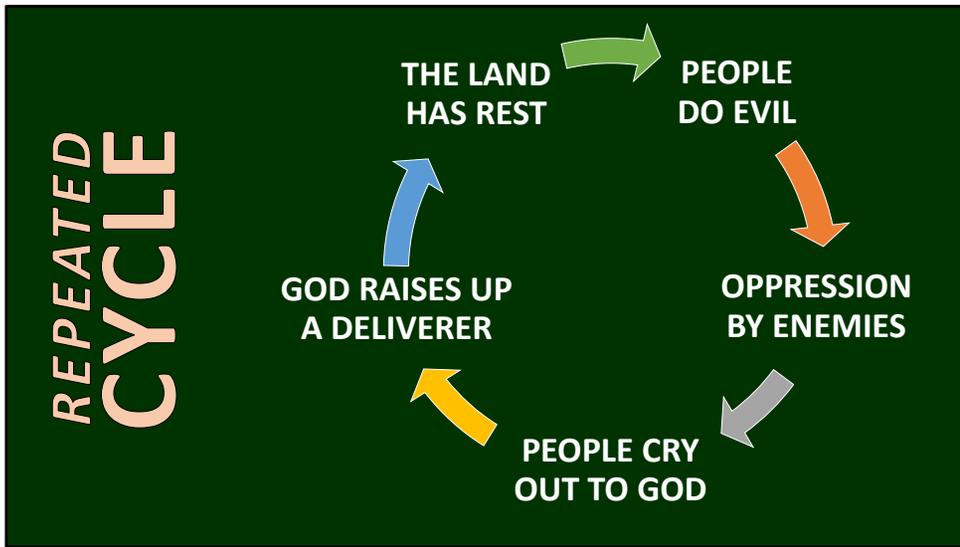
TR: In Judges 4-5 we read about . . .



6

- ... a judge named Deborah and a military leader called Barak.
- Deborah was a prophetess and a judge.
 - She judged from the lower middle of the country.
 - Some have wondered if the judicial system prescribed in Deut. 16:18 and 17:8-11 was not being implemented.

TR: As the account unfolds, we see the familiar cycle found through the time of the Judges.



7

REVIEW SLIDE

TR: Let's start in Judges 4:1 . . .

Judges 4:1-2

And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD after Ehud died. ²And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim.

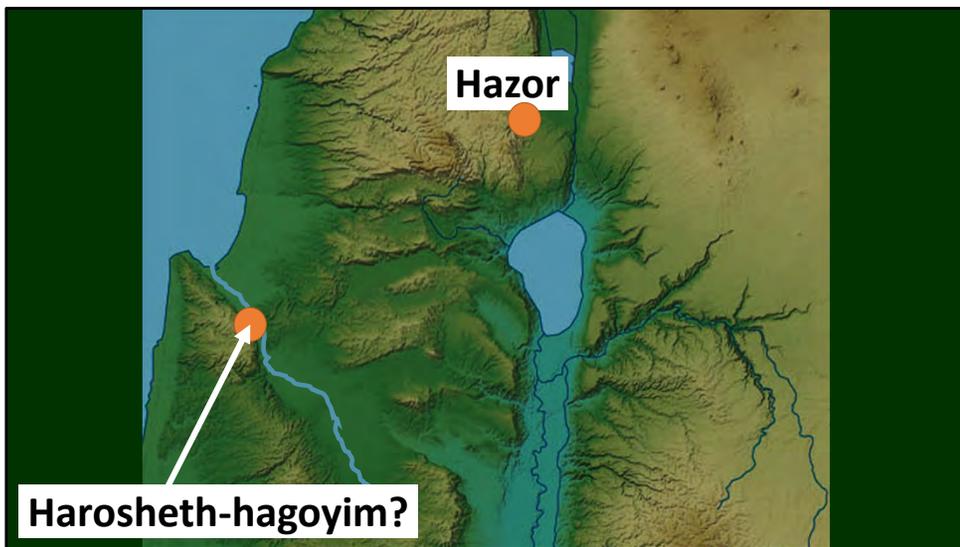
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8

READ SLIDE

-- We know that the hand of Jabin oppressed them so that, as 5:6 says, “the highways were abandoned, and travelers kept to the byways.”

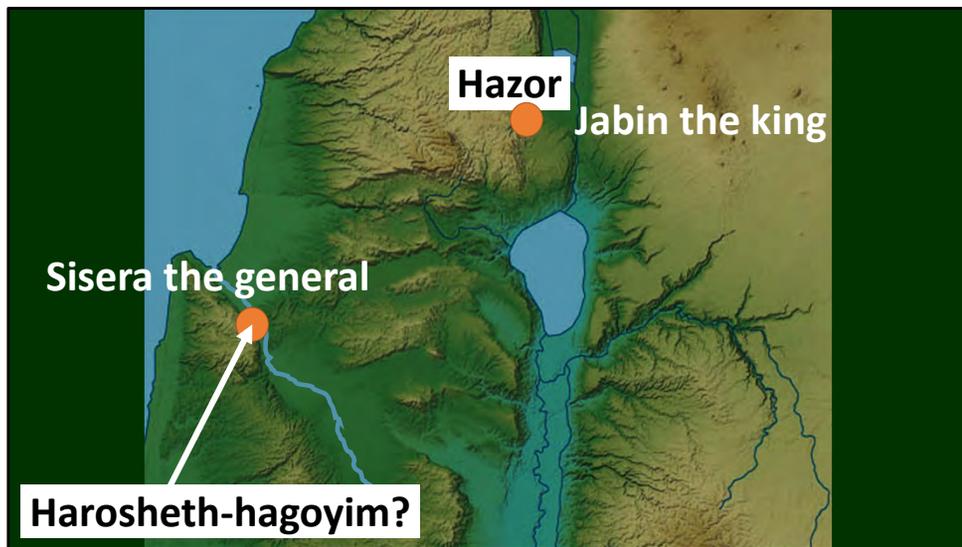
TR: If we zoom in on the northern portion of the land of Israel, we see that . . .



9

. . . there are two key axis points of oppression.
-- To the north, beyond the Sea or Lake of Galilee, we find Hazor.
-- And a bit south and to the west, toward the Mediterranean side of the Jezreel valley, we find Harosheth of the Gentiles.

TR: From these two points . . .



10

... Jabin the king and Sisera the general wielded a strong hand of oppression over the fertile valley and the northern hills.

TR: Finally the people stopped just complaining and cried out to the LORD. God awakens Deborah to action.

Judges 4:6

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

ESV

11

READ SLIDE

-- This strong woman sensed God calling her to call out a man from the oppressed lands to fight Jabin.

-- Barak had traveled the some 70 miles, probably a three day journey, to meet with this well-known godly judge.

TR: His response to what she said . . .

Judges 4:8-9

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

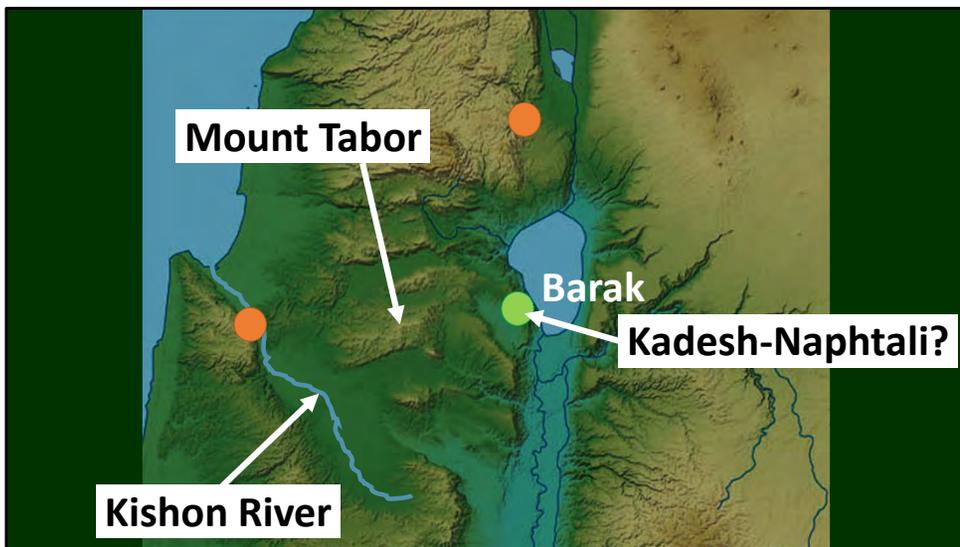
ESV

12

READ SLIDE

- Why would Barak want Deborah to go with? Because she was close with God? Because she was an influential and well-known person who would help legitimize the recruitment efforts? We really don't know.
- But her prophetic response tells us that Barak's response did not warrant praise.
- The first time a person reads this account, it is easy to assume the woman who gets the glory is Deborah, but that is not the case.

TR: On our map . . .



... we see that Barak was probably from the land near the Sea of Galilee.

-- There is a Kadash even north of Hazor, but most scholars don't seem to think the evidence points there.

-- The troops were to gather at Mount Tabor, an easy to find location that had a view of the valley below.

-- One additional feature is the Kishon River, which starts up in the mountains on the south side of the valley and runs westerly to the Mediterranean.

TR: Barak, along with judge Deborah, are successful in recruiting a fighting force of 10,000. The reference in 5:8 speaks of almost no weapons for 40,000, but that may have been for a second phase of the battle.

Judges 4:14

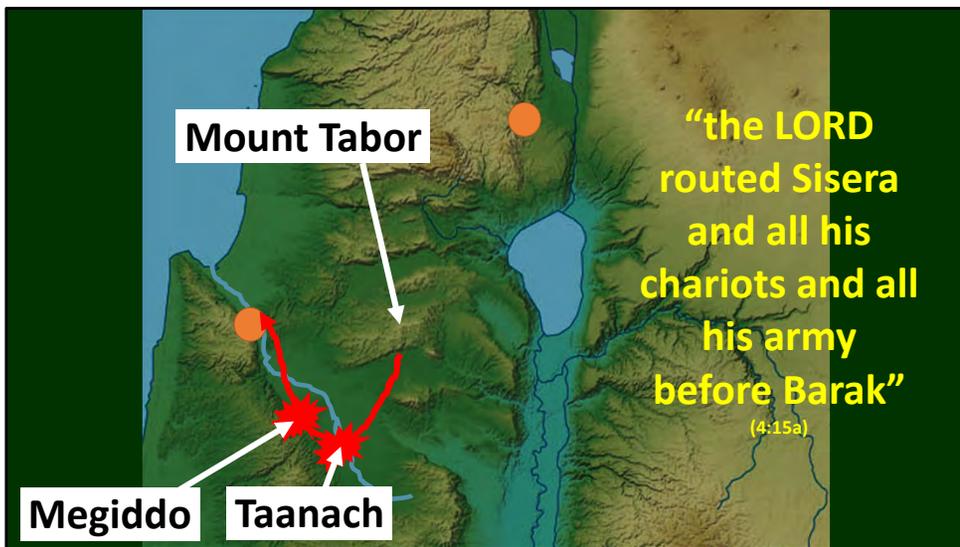
And Deborah said to Barak, “Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. Does not the LORD go out before you?” So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him.

ESV

14

From Mount Tabor . . . READ SLIDE

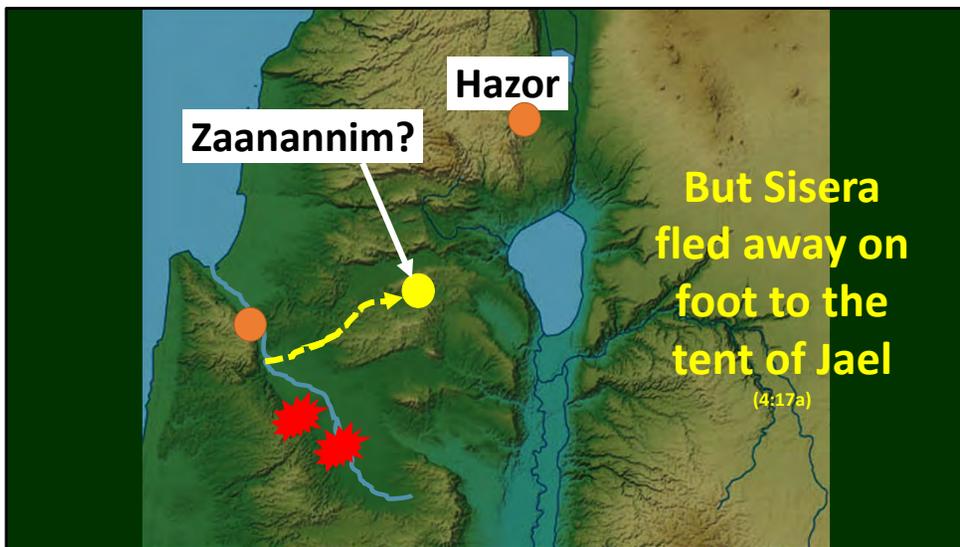
TR: The result . . .



READ SLIDE

- The battle is described as moving from the central part of the valley and moving westward.
- Eventually the army of Barak would wipe out Sisera’s army all the way back to Harosheth of the Gentiles.

TR: Disgraced and his chariot useless . . .

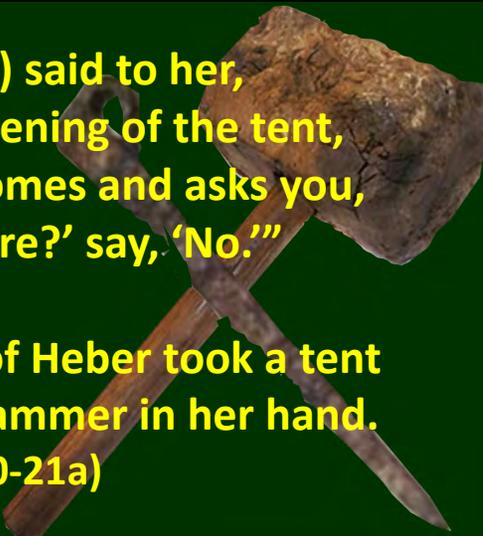


16

. . . READ SLIDE

- This cowardly man left his troops to be destroyed to the last man as he fled, probably toward Hazor, where King Jabin was located.**
- Exhausted, he remembers that there is peace between Jabin and Heber.**
- He seeks a place to hide out but finds only Heber's wife, Jael home.**
- She offers him the traditional hospitality known in the part of the world . . . but goes even further and welcomes him into her tent.**
- After feeding him well, all Sisera wants is to sleep.**

TR: Many think that it is at this time is when Jael decides to change course from hospitable to hostile. Perhaps it was what Sisera said to her.



And (Sisera) said to her,
“Stand at the opening of the tent,
and if any man comes and asks you,
‘Is anyone here?’ say, ‘No.’”

But Jael the wife of Heber took a tent
peg, and took a hammer in her hand.
(4:20-21a)

READ SLIDE

- She then knew that he was not just a weary traveler but a man on the run.
- It was time for her to decide if her loyalties would be with the agreement King Jabin made with her husband . . .
- OR if she would side with God’s oppressed people.
- She NAILED the decision, didn’t she?
- Putting up the Bedouin tent was a woman’s job, so she knew her way around a mallet and tent peg.
- But the decision to kill this general was no light thing.
- If he awoke, she would die. If she missed the mark and only wounded him, she would die.
- And how was she to know for sure how the battle had faired? Perhaps she would be choosing the losing side.

TR: It was time to decide. And the result as chapter 5’s song penned by Deborah says . . .

Judges 5:24

**Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife
of Heber the Kenite, of tent-dwelling
women most blessed.**

ESV

18

READ SLIDE

-- Jael was most blessed, repeated in the common pattern of Hebrew poetry.

TR: The day's battle lead to further battles and victory . . .

Judges 4:23-24

So on that day God subdued Jabin the king of Canaan before the people of Israel. ²⁴And the hand of the people of Israel pressed harder and harder against Jabin the king of Canaan, until they destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.

ESV

19

READ SLIDE

TR: The oft-repeated cycle reaches the good part, as the last verse of chapter 5's song says . . .

Judges 5:31

**“So may all your enemies perish,
O LORD!**

**But your friends be like the sun
as he rises in his might.”**

And the land had rest for forty years.

ESV

20

READ SLIDE

**TR: There are lots of decision points along the way in this account.
We begin by asking ourselves . . .**

*TIME TO
DECIDE*

21

**Do I really believe the
battle belongs to the LORD?**

READ SLIDE

-- I often write the application questions as “we” but I chose first person so that we individually realize that it is time for each of us to chose.

TR: God worked through Deborah and Barak and the volunteers, but ultimately, this was God’s fight in response to His people crying out to Him.

Judges 4:6b, 14c, 23a

“Has not **the LORD, the God of Israel,**
commanded you . . .”

“Does not **the LORD** go out before you?”

So on that day **God** subdued Jabin . . .

ESV

22

**Twice Deborah challenges Barak . . . READ SLIDE (first two quotes)
-- and the summary of the day is . . . READ SLIDE (third quote)**

**TR: The song of Deborah makes it even clearer that the battle
belongs to the LORD.**

Judges 5:4-5

“LORD, when you went out from Seir,
when you marched from the region of
Edom, the earth trembled and the
heavens dropped, yes, the clouds
dropped water. ⁵The mountains quaked
before the LORD, even Sinai before the
LORD, the God of Israel.

ESV

23

READ SLIDE

TR: Do you see the clue in the clouds dropping water. And again in verse 19 . . .

Judges 5:19-21

“The kings came, they fought; then fought the kings of Canaan, at Taanach, by the waters of Megiddo; they got no spoils of silver. ²⁰From heaven the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera. ²¹The torrent Kishon swept them away, the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon. **March on, my soul, with might!**

ESV

24

READ SLIDE

- The incredible rain that God sent turned the Kishon river into a torrent.
- The advantage of the 900 chariots on the plains of the valley was gone.
- Barak and the troops had taken the battle right to Sisera . . . on his home turf where the advantage should have been his.

TR: But when God sent the rains . . .



... READ SLIDE

-- "the galloping" = the prancing

-- it seems as the chariots got stuck that the horses broke rank and ran every which way.

-- These chapters and all of Judges makes clear that the battle belongs to the LORD. In the challenges of what you are facing ... do you agree.

TR: And if we nod in agreement, then there is a second question we must individually answer ...

*TIME TO
DECIDE*

**Will I offer myself willingly
to the LORD's service?**

26

READ SLIDE

TR: Deborah's song of praise makes it clear that she was so thankful that . . .

Judges 5:2, 9

“That the **leaders took the lead** in Israel,
that the **people offered themselves**
willingly, bless the LORD!

My heart goes out to the commanders of
Israel who **offered themselves willingly**
among the people. Bless the LORD.

ESV

27

READ SLIDE

-- The service of the LORD may mean upper management, middle management, or just the foundational and most basic work of the “grunts.”

TR: But the time will come when we must decide if we will enlist, even when the odds are against us.

Sisera called out all his chariots, 900 chariots of iron, and all the men who were with him, from Harosheth-hagoyim to the river Kishon.

ESV

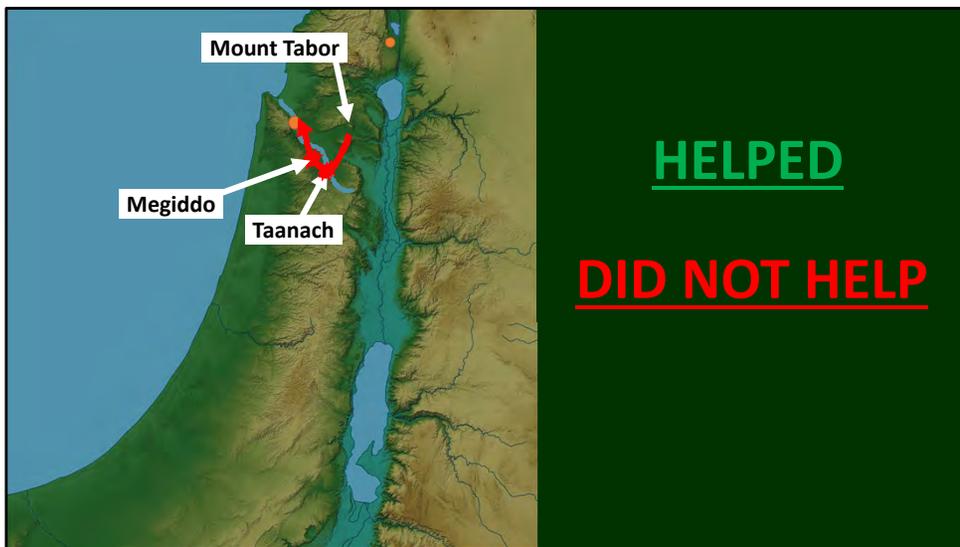
In 4:13 we read . . . READ SLIDE

-- The chariots were the tanks of the day. They ruled the more flat lands.

-- Do I really believe the battle belongs to the LORD?

-- Will I offer myself willingly to the LORD's service?

TR: These two foundational questions we hear as the TIME TO DECIDE ticks on, is followed by a number of other points of decision. These are based on the insights of the responses of the characters in the account.



29

Perhaps it is easiest to divide the people into those who helped and those who did not.

-- The movement of Barak's troops went from Mount Tabor, down into the valley and then to the north-west.

TR: Deborah's song celebrates those who helped. In 5:14 we read of . . .

Judges 5:14-15a

From **Ephraim** their root they marched down into the valley, following you, **Benjamin**, with your kinsmen; from **Machir** marched down the commanders, and from **Zebulun** those who bear the lieutenant's staff; ¹⁵the princes of **Issachar** came with Deborah, and Issachar faithful to Barak; into the valley they rushed at his heels.

ESV

30

Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir, Zebulun, and Issachar.

TR: Verse 18. . .

Judges 5:18

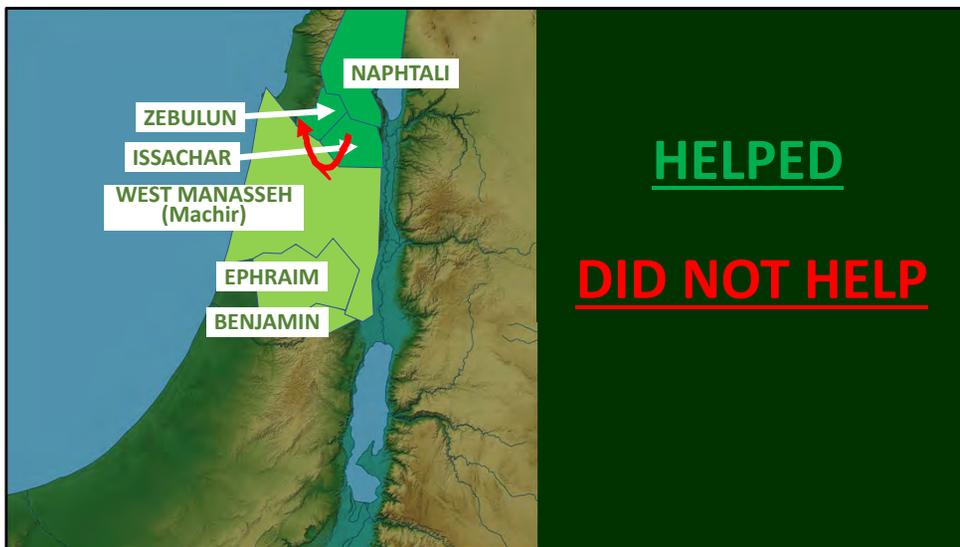
¹⁸**Zebulun** is a people who risked their lives to the death; **Naphtali**, too, on the heights of the field.

ESV

31

... repeats Zebulun and adds Naphtali.

TR: On our map we see ...



32

... that the help comes from the tribes most closely impacted by the oppression of Jabin and Sisera.

-- Special praise goes to the northern lands, from which Barak hailed.

TR: Deborah's song did not just praise those who offered themselves willingly, but also shamed the others.

Judges 5:15b-16

Among the clans of **Reuben** there were **great searchings of heart**. ¹⁶Why did you sit still among the sheepfolds, to hear the whistling for the flocks? Among the clans of Reuben there were **great searchings of heart**.

ESV

33

The tribe of Reuben is interesting . . . READ SLIDE

-- They had a lot of heart-pangs about the situation but they just sat still among their sheepfolds.

TR: Verse 17 continues . . .

Judges 5:17

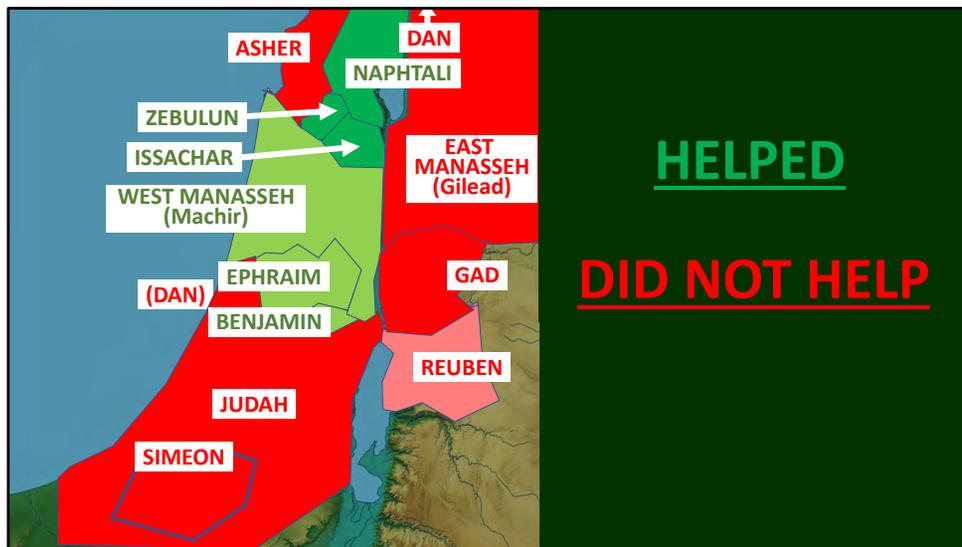
Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan; and **Dan**, why did he stay with the ships? **Asher** sat still at the coast of the sea, staying by his landings.

ESV

34

READ SLIDE

TR: Back on our map we add the tribes who . . .



35

. . . did not help.

- Judah, Gad, and Simeon aren't even mentioned. Perhaps Judah and Simeon were just too far out of the picture.**
- Gilead or East Manasseh may have thought, this is not our fight, we are on the other side of the Jordan.**
- Asher and Dan just stayed by the Mediterranean, minding their own business.**
- We don't know if where exactly Dan was since they never conquered their inheritance portion and we know they end up way north by the city of Dan.**

TR: But the worst shame fell not upon a tribe but upon a city close to Mount Tabor.

Judges 5:23

Curse Meroz, says the angel of the LORD, curse its inhabitants thoroughly, because they did not come to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty.

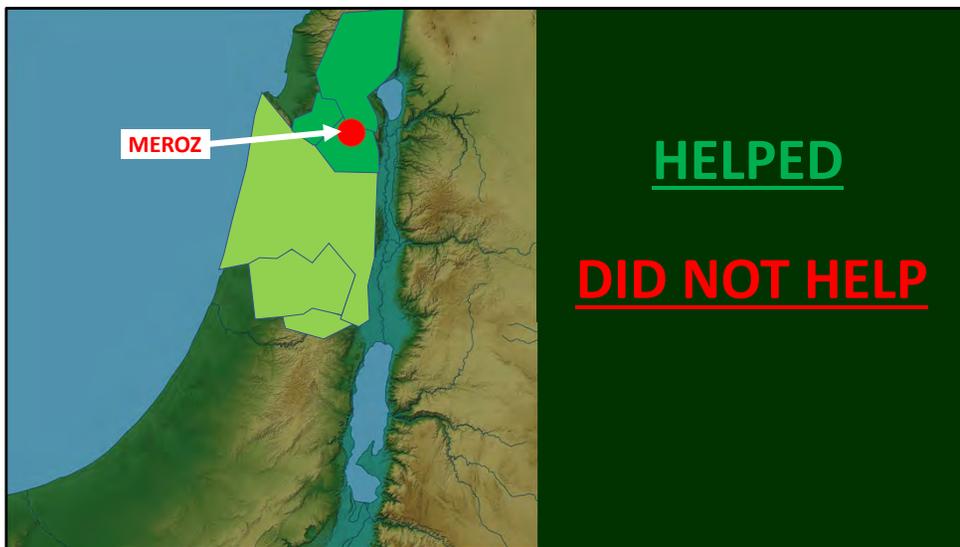
ESV

36

READ SLIDE

- It was not Deborah that cursed them but the angel of the LORD.
- Let's read that again . . . slowly . . . **READ SLIDE**

TR: On our map . . .



37

... Meroz would have been in the middle of the deep green of those who helped.

- They would have had the most to gain.
- They had probably the least distance to travel to the rallying point of Mount Tabor.
- "CURSE MEROZ."

TR: The song of the Judge ends imagining Sisera the general's mother and her thoughts about the delay as she waited for his return.

Judges 5:30

(Imagining Sisera's mother's thoughts at his delay in returning)

**Have they not found
and divided the spoil?—**

**A womb or two for every man;
spoil of dyed materials for Sisera,
spoil of dyed materials embroidered,
two pieces of dyed work
embroidered for the neck as spoil?'**

ESV

38

READ SLIDE

- Everyone, even the enemy's mother, expects everything to keep on going as it has been.**
- They may not approve of the way things are, but they like the spoils.**
- We too like the spoils of our current behaviors.**
- The status quo is very difficult to change.**
- But this passage is challenging us to the reality that it is TIME TO DECIDE. Do we believe the battle belongs to the LORD? Are we willing to offer ourselves willingly, in whatever role God has called us to?**

TR: 6 questions that we individually must answer if we really are to decide to offer ourselves willingly. These last 6 expose our DELAY TACTICS when it is TIME TO DECIDE.

**TIME TO
DECIDE**

39

**Is “good enough”
really enough?**

The first TIME TO DECIDE QUESTION . . . READ SLIDE

-- Cf. Deborah’s ministry as prophetess, as judge, with great respect and influence.

-- Why would the problems of the “up north” be something she would concern herself with.

-- But doing “good enough” or settling in our hearts that we are doing “enough good” really isn’t what God is asking. It may just be a **DELAY TACTIC**.

-- He is calling us to decide. Will we offer ourselves willingly, no matter how much we’ve already done.

TR: A second TIME TO DECIDE QUESTION, from Barak’s experience .

..

**Will I admit my insecurity
and ask for help?**

READ SLIDE

- This leader was a man of enough renown that Deborah would know of him and the men would rally around him . . .
- . . . even to the point at “being on his heels” (4:10).
- But he admitted his insecurity . . . and God graciously provided through Deborah’s presence with him.
- Again and again we see the LORD being gracious in our weakness . . . but we must cry out . . . we must ask for help.
- Is your insecurity based on true humility or is it merely a **DELAY TACTIC?**

TR: A third TIME TO DECIDE QUESTION . . .

**TIME TO
DECIDE**

41

**Does my “searching my heart”
really count as obedience?**

READ SLIDE

- This comes from the rebuke of the tribe of Reuben. Great searching of heart but no moving of their rears.
- A lighter shade of red is not any shade of green!
- Even these questions we are searching our souls with are not enough . . . it is time to decide.
- It is time to “put your pencils down and turn in your test.”
- EX: Struggle to buy first computer . . . Kathy: Make a decision!
- Having good intentions can be just a DELAY TACTIC, can't it?

TR: The next TIME TO DECIDE QUESTION comes from the tribes who did not come to help.

TIME TO DECIDE

42

**Does my preoccupation with
“busyness as usual” really
mean I do not have a choice?**

READ SLIDE

- The “busyness as usual” is intentional. A play on “business as usual.”
- Where does this come from? Asher had things to do. Dan had things to do. Gilead too.
- Cf. people’s response to, “How are you doing?” The typical answer is either “Fine” or “Busy.”
- Perhaps you have felt called by God to offer yourself willingly to His service . . . but then you squashed that thought with the reality of how busy you are.
- You rationalize that you really haven’t said NO, just NOT NOW. Let’s call it what it is, a DELAY TACTIC.
- Busyness is our choice.
- EX: D.Min. class with challenge to quit if could not do what the LORD has called you to.

TR: The fifth TIME TO DECIDE QUESTION . . .

42

**Is my fear really a valid reason
for letting others fight my
battles for me?**

READ SLIDE

- Where does this come from? From Meroz.
- We can speculate that they were afraid. They knew the battle was “against the mighty” (5:23).
- But they had the most to gain. If this was anyone’s fight, it was theirs.
- God has not given us a spirit of fear.
- What He calls us to do, He will provision us to do.
- One famous preacher called Meroz a role model for the “shirker.”
- Are you letting fear make your decisions? Is giving into your fear merely a DELAY TACTIC, hoping someone else will come and save the day?

TR: And finally, the sixth TIME TO DECIDE QUESTION

**Am I allowing others'
expectations to make my
choices for me?**

READ SLIDE

- Who in the account is this tied to? To Jael.
- She would have been seen as an obedient little woman, fulfilling the marital and cultural expectations.
- Sisera certainly did not think she posed a threat, his expectation of her was to protect him with lies.
- But Jael, the most blessed among the women of the tents, knew that it was time for her to decide.
- It was time to decide for or against following God.
- It was time to decide based on the information she had, not that which she did not know.
- Are you allowing others to decide for you? Perhaps they don't even think to ask you? Perhaps they presume upon you and don't wait for your thoughtful response. Isn't it time to do what God wants . . . to willingly offer yourself to His service?
- What if Jael used a DELAY TACTIC? What if Sisera woke up with strength returned? What if the moment of opportunity passed by?

**TR: These 6 last questions expose our delay tactics. They⁴⁴
support the first two: Battle = LORD's?; Offer Willingly?**

The torrent Kishon swept them away,
the ancient torrent, the torrent Kishon.
March on, my soul, with might!

ESV

If you are ready to believe, ready to heed God's call to action, knowing that now is the time to decide . . .

-- . . . then be encouraged by this peace of Scriptural history and have hope.

-- Even as Deborah in her song, reflecting on the great work of God to send the unexpected thunderstorm that swelled the Kishon river to overflowing, let's say to ourselves . . .

-- "MARCH ON, MY SOUL, WITH MIGHT!"

-- It is time to decide to either MARCH ON or hang up our hammocks as shirkers.

TR: This account is for us, women and men. Deborah is the prime hero, and then there's Jael.

Hebrews 11:32-34

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, **Barak**, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—³³who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,³⁴quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

ESV

46

And the hall of fame of faith in Hebrews 11 tells us of Barak.

-- READ SLIDE

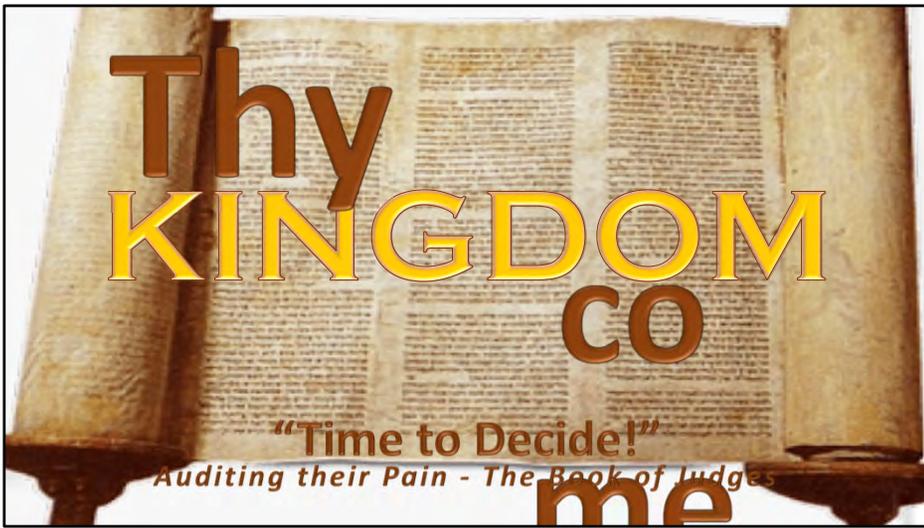
-- It is time to decide, do we just want to visit the hall of fame of faith . . . or be in it?

-- Do you believe the battle belongs to the LORD?

-- Will you offer yourself willingly to the LORD's service?

-- Or will you use a delay tactic and miss the moment?

TR: It is time to decide we mean it when we pray . . .



47

... Thy kingdom come!