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Joshua's victory over the Amalekites

TRUE HEROES ARE HARD TO COME BY NOWADAYS.

We often tend to elevate sports figures, media personalities or Hollywood stars to hero status, just because they're beautiful, famous or particularly good at something. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines a hero as "a person admired for achievements and noble qualities" and "one who shows great courage." If we expand "noble qualities" to include humility, selflessness, compassion and godly wisdom, how would our heroes measure up?

In her book *Women on the Front Lines*, Michal Ann Goll issued a challenge to the Church: "...the Lord is calling us to be heroes. He is preparing us for a time soon to come when the world will cry out for leaders who are in touch with the heart and mind of God."

Joshua and Deborah

In the time of Joshua and the biblical judges, people were crying out for heroes. As the events in these Bible books unfolded, God was revealing His power to the Israelites (and the surrounding peoples) by establishing them in the land of Canaan with miraculous signs and wonders. The time was ripe for heroes with the heart and mind of God to arise and work alongside Him.

Joshua and Deborah were prophets, warriors—and heroes—to whom the Children of ancient Israel looked for guidance and leadership. Joshua lived during the time of the conquest of Canaan, and Deborah during the time of the judges, thus 200 years apart. God commissioned Joshua to take the land of Canaan (Josh. 1:3). One of his conquests was the Canaanite city-state of Hazor and its king, Jabin. Two hundred years later, Deborah was also commissioned to come against another Jabin, king of Hazor (Judg. 4:6–7). Jabin appears to be a dynastic name or a title, such as Pharaoh or Abimelech.

Let's take a look at the heroism of Joshua and Deborah through the lens of Hazor, Jabin's capital city.

The City of Hazor

The ancient city of Hazor was situated about 10 miles (16 km.) north of the Sea of Galilee on the edge of the Hula Valley. It was the most important city in the Levant between the 19th and 13th centuries BC. It straddled an ancient trading route linking Egypt and Mesopotamia and became powerful and wealthy. Including an acropolis and a lower city spread over 200 acres (80 ha.) it was about 10 times the size of most cities of the time. Hazor means “enclosed” and “fortified,” and even today, looking up at the 130-foot-high (40 m.) steep-sided *tel*, one can see how difficult it would have been to conquer.

Hazor's ruins were first discovered in 1928, with archaeological excavations continuing into the 1950s, and resumed in 1990 under archaeologist Amnon Ben-Tor. Excavations have uncovered bronze statues and swords, ivory, jewelry, seals, a lion-headed drinking cup and a large ceremonial palace, indicating the opulent lifestyle the inhabitants enjoyed. Ben-Tor also discovered massive jars of scorched wheat, burnt cedar beams, soot-lined walls and a 3-foot (0.9 m.) layer of ash, evidence of a fiery conflagration hot enough to melt clay ceramics and split open basalt building slabs. Ben-Tor referred to the blaze as “the mother of all fires.”

Joshua's Northern Campaign

As Joshua and his army advanced northward through Canaan, news of his military successes in the south reached King Jabin of



Tel Hazor from the east

Hazor. He had heard about the destruction of Jericho, Ai and the five kings of the Amorites at Gibeon, and that God had made the sun and moon stand still for Joshua. He knew the powerful God of Israel was fighting for the Israelites, and yet he deliberately chose to go to war against them. Jabin rallied numerous kings and their armies for his coalition force, but Hazor was the *“head of all those kingdoms”* (Josh. 11:10). His army was as vast *“as the sand that is on the seashore in multitude, with very many horses and chariots”* (v. 4).

The Jewish historian Josephus gave us the actual number of troops in the coalition: 300,000 infantrymen, a cavalry of 10,000 and 20,000 chariots. This vast horde was the largest army Israel had yet faced, and the Israelites were terrified. Yet God reassured Joshua, *“Do not be afraid because of them, for tomorrow about this time I will deliver all of them slain before Israel’... So Joshua and all the people of war with him came against them suddenly by the waters of Merom, and they attacked them. And the LORD delivered them into the hand of Israel...”* (Josh. 11:6–8).

The Destruction of Hazor

The Bible tells us the Lord hardened Jabin's heart so he would choose to come against Israel in battle *"that He [God] might utterly destroy them...as the LORD had commanded Moses"* (Josh. 11:20). Joshua then went to Hazor *"and struck its king with the sword...they struck all the people who were in it with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them...Then he burned Hazor with fire"* (vv. 10–11).

While archaeologists argue over who destroyed Hazor, Ben-Tor believes it could be none other than the Israelite army under Joshua. As the only people in the neighborhood who believed in one God, archaeological evidence shows the Israelites zealously defaced all the Canaanite statues of gods and kings found in Hazor and lopped off their hands.

The Bible tells us Joshua did all that the Lord had commanded him, and *"he left nothing undone"* (Josh. 11:15), including burning the chariots and hamstringing their horses (the Hebrew for hamstringing implies to geld rather than cripple) to make them useless for war (v. 9). God did not want the Israelites to trust in chariots or horses; He wanted them to place their trust in Him alone (Ps. 20:7). After Joshua destroyed Hazor, the city remained abandoned for almost 200 years.

The Wickedness of Canaan

Joshua's campaign of taking Canaan and forcefully destroying the people often seems unduly harsh to believers familiar with Jesus' (Yeshua's) command to love our enemies. But the Canaanite religion was so wicked that God's patience eventually ran out, and He could no longer let the people go unpunished.

The Canaanites worshiped many gods. Their chief gods were El and his wife the fertility goddess Asherah. Their son, the storm god Baal, was also linked to fertility. Fertility was of prime importance in the Canaanite religion, where men and women participated in ritual prostitution to ensure the good production of their farmland (Hoerth). God determined to eradicate the immorality and cruelty of those who worshiped the cult deities from the land *"...for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to*

their gods” (Deut. 12:31). God wanted the Israelites to avoid being ensnared by Canaanite idolatry, child sacrifice and sexual rituals. God decreed that the land would no longer belong to the Canaanites—He would give it into the hands of the Israelites.

Israel after Joshua

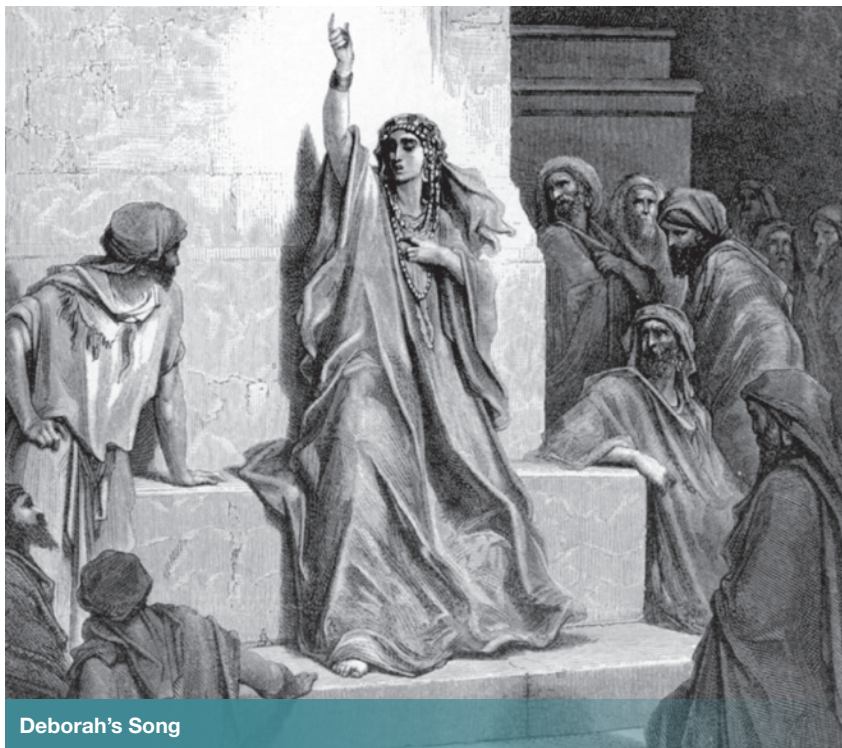
After *“the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand”* (Josh. 21:44), Israel rested and enjoyed everything the Lord had promised. War was over and the people could build their homes and till their land. God had fulfilled His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and planted His people in the land of Canaan. Yet Joshua warned the tribes, *“You have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you. But take careful heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments, to hold fast to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul”* (Josh. 22:2, 5).

Joshua’s reprimand was a reminder that the God of Israel had fought for the Israelites and given them their victories and their inheritance, and if they obeyed Him, the Commander of the armies of heaven would continue to walk with them. Israel transitioned with hope and promise into the next phase of their history.

Israel in Apostasy

Years of peace made the people complacent, and they replaced their covenant righteousness with idolatry. Every tribe except Judah failed to drive out the Canaanites completely from their territory. It was easier to go-along-to-get-along with those whom God had commanded them to subdue. The Children of Israel were enticed into following after the baals by mingling and intermarrying with the Canaanites and forsaking the God of Israel. The Canaanites eventually proved to be *“snares...traps...scourges on your [the Israelites’] sides and thorns in your eyes”* (Josh. 23:13).

The apostasy of this new generation of Israelites brought upon themselves captivity and bondage under the brutal reign of another Jabin, king of Hazor, and his cruel general Sisera. The Canaanites had reestablished themselves and their capital Hazor in the land.



Deborah's Song

Ironically, the Israelites were now oppressed by those they had formerly enslaved.

Israel became a hostile place. Bands of marauders roamed the highways and people were terrified to leave their homes. Lawlessness was rampant, and a pall of hopelessness and fear hung over the land. Jabin's might was intimidating. With tens of thousands of troops at his beck and call, no Israelite warrior dared come against him. The hearts of the people were shackled by fear, and they cried out to God for help.

Deborah: Judge, Prophet, Warrior

After 20 years under Jabin's cruelty, God provided a deliverer. Deborah was a godly woman who had remained faithful to God. She was grieved by the sin of her people and sought to draw them back to the Lord. As a judge and a *"mother in Israel"* (Judg. 5:7), people felt her compassion and streamed to her for wise counsel. Deborah listened to God, and He elevated her to a position of

governmental, spiritual and military authority in the land—then He gave her a strategy to defeat Jabin.

She called Barak, an Israelite general, and revealed God’s plan for victory. Barak was no doubt bewildered by the order. Even if he managed to gather an army, none of his troops had weapons—they had all been confiscated by the Canaanites. *“Not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel”* (Judg. 5:8). Going to war without weapons was suicidal. Facing a battle-hardened enemy 100,000 men strong with 900 iron chariots—the ancient world’s high-tech lethal weapon of war—was even more so.

Though he initially balked at what Deborah had to say, Barak and his army must have had immense respect for her courage and ability to hear clearly from the Lord, for he assembled his army at the top of Mount Tabor and then led them into battle. For his courage in the face of fearsome odds, Barak is listed as one of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11.

Deborah did not flinch at the Lord’s command, and, at Barak’s insistence, went with the army. She had heard from God and was confident that their battle plan would lead to victory. She urged on Barak and his troops with the reminder that God would fight for them and deliver Jabin’s army into their hands at the River Kishon that very day (Judg. 4:7, 14).

The Battle with Jabin

A freak rainstorm caught the Canaanite army by surprise as their chariots thundered toward the Israelite troops. The Song of Deborah in Judges 5 recorded that the overflowing waters of the River Kishon swept the enemy away. Josephus elaborated on the biblical account and wrote that “a great storm of rain and hail arose, and the wind blew the rain in the faces of the Canaanites, so blinding them that their bows and slings proved useless, and their infantry found it difficult to use their swords in the cold. But the storm hampered the Israelites less, since it blew at their backs, and they took courage in this help from God and fought more bravely.”

The Lord routed the entire Canaanite army, and Barak pursued them until not an enemy was left alive (Judg. 4:16). *“...And the hand of the children of Israel grew stronger and stronger against Jabin king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan”* (v. 24).



The defeat of Sisera and the Canaanite army

The Victory is the Lord's

The story of this battle echoes the story of the Israelites at the Red Sea. The Children of Israel stood helpless as Pharaoh's chariots raced toward them and the sea blocked any escape. There Moses told the people to *"stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD"* (Exod. 14:13).

The Israelite victory over the Canaanites was no less miraculous than their ancestors' victory over the Egyptians—and required just as much faith. God showed He was in control of the Red Sea, the waters of Merom, the River Kishon, the rain, the hail—and the enemy.

The Land had Rest

Deborah had roused the troops to fight, but she also provoked the Israelites' desire to serve God once again, for He had delivered them from Jabin, king of Hazor, and the Canaanite army. As in the time of Joshua, God then gave *shalom* to the people and the land. The nation was purified and *"the land had rest for forty years"* (Judg. 5:31).

The Power of Worship

Joshua and Deborah were both worshipers, wholly dedicated to the God of Israel. They spent time in His presence and were loath to leave it. Joshua stayed at the Tent of Meeting long after everyone else had gone back to their tents (Exod. 33:11). Deborah responded to the Israelite victory with a beautiful song of praise to the Lord (Judg. 5). We can be sure she praised God *before* the battle and *in the midst* of it as well. Her impassioned song displayed a lifetime saturated in worship.

The word for worship in Hebrew is *avodah* (עבודה), the same word used for work and service. To Joshua and Deborah, worship was harmoniously integrated with faithful action. They got up from their knees and rode into the fray with swords flashing and a hallelujah on their lips. They recognized worship as an essential part of their warfare and wielded it just as effectively as their natural weapons.

Their watchword was the *Shema* (Deut. 6:5), to love the Lord their God with all their heart, with all their soul and with all their strength. Worship emboldened their hearts and prepared them to take possession of the inheritance God had given them—the land and His presence.

We who belong to the Kingdom of God must also saturate ourselves in worship, for we too belong to His army and our battle isn't *"against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age"* (Eph. 6:12).

Our Commander has already promised that the kingdom of the enemy will be destroyed, so our lives can resound with a victory song every day. *"Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors! And the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle"* (Ps. 24:7–8).

A Call to Arms

Is our world so different from that of ancient Israel? Many people are weighed down by hopeless situations, financial struggles, family dynamics, cities riddled with crime, governments focused only on staying in power and church people drifting away from intimacy with the Lord who no longer think godly lifestyles are relevant.

God is calling men and women with the spirits of Joshua and Deborah to arise—those who are righteous in character and action, who will go to the mat for their families and their nations; who are heartbroken over a society run amok with the spirit of Jabin and who pray passionately for God to intervene.

We need people who immerse themselves in His Word, who hear His voice, receive His strategies and put those strategies into action. We need heroes with the heart and mind of God who will take territory and build His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. God is asking, “*Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?*” People of valor must answer the call: “*Here am I! Send me*” (Isa. 6:8).

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Scripture is taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

TERMINOLOGY:

Many of our readers are seasoned supporters of Israel while others are just beginning to understand the importance of standing with God’s chosen nation; some prefer the use of Hebrew names and terms, while others are comfortable with more traditional Christian terminology. Because we want to show respect to all of our readers while providing an enjoyable educational experience, we are making every effort to use both terms whenever possible. The following are some of the most common examples:

- Jesus (Yeshua)
- *Tanakh* (Old Testament or OT)—*Tanakh* is an acronym used in Judaism which stands for *Torah, Neviim* or Prophets and *Ketuvim* or Writings.
- Writings of the Apostles (New Testament or NT)
- *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)



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