

*“Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth,
was leading[a] Israel at that time.”*

The story of Deborah is a difficult story to understand. Like all the judges, Deborah shows us how the power of the Lord can deliver us from a particular evil or falsity, but the Heavenly Doctrines do not have much directly to say about Deborah. They do offer many indirect clues through the rich collection of people, places, and things mentioned in our story in chapter four and repeated in chapter five.

Repeated stories are important ones: the creation story is told twice, Saul and then David are each anointed twice, and the birth of Jesus is told twice. It is also a story about women acting on their own, like Rebekah or Mary, which makes it even more notable.

In the light of the Heavenly Doctrines, the story of Deborah – along with Barak and Jael - is a story about overcoming the idolatry of logic. At first we are oppressed by our own ability to logically twist truths and justify falsities. Then, Deborah shows us to turn to the Lord with awe (AC 8753). Second, Barak (as enlightened truth) chases away falsities, and finally Jael disposes of justification itself through innocence and humility.

By ‘the idolatry of logic’ we mean valuing more that truth ‘makes sense’ than that the truth is Divine. This can lead us to think that if a truth doesn’t make sense to us, we have the authority to discard it. The Heavenly Doctrines do tell us that we should temporarily set teachings aside if we don’t understand them, but the idolatry of logic discards those teachings entirely, happy to see them go. It isn’t a lack of understanding, it is a refusal to accept something we don’t like. At its worst, the idolatry of logic places our own thinking above the Lord, which places our own intellect above the Lord and leads to darkness and confusion. Very soon, unchecked, the idolatry of logic leads to false justifications of every dark desire with all the misery and despair that go with indulging them (AC 2851).

We all know what it feels like to encounter an unpleasant truth. When we listen to a person or idea with which we disagree, suddenly summoned to mind come all the reasons we need not listen, all the reasons we are allowed to dislike and discount them. If it a doctrinal debate, we quickly become sure they are misrepresenting the truth. Especially when we read clear statements from the Word, we can twist and writhe, evoking ‘context’, ‘tone’, refusing to believe the Word and blaming the Word for not making sense. When the Word tells us our affections are invisible, or we are inclined to every evil, or Hell is eternal, we claim these ideas ‘don’t make sense’ – but because our ‘sense’ obeys our will.

Regarding the permanence of Hell, we may say, ‘but He is a God of love’ or ‘I don’t understand how they wouldn’t eventually change’. The worst part is that we call forth truths to prove our point. If we use the truths this way, though, they are no longer ruling our lives – our own power of logic and justification reign (DP 117).

Most of the time, the reasonableness of the truths of the Word is a good thing; we are used to taking comfort from how sensible the Lord can be, how truths can be beautifully arranged in our minds and lives, how we can derive joy in learning and using truths in ways that we see as reasonable and rational. We should keep this notion and the Lord wants us to see His truths as logical, but ‘logic’ is not the defining or essential quality of truth; its Divine authority from Divine love is its defining quality. Because it is from Divine love and wisdom, the truths we see should appear logical and reasonable, but if they don’t, that is our problem; those truths remain Divine all the same. It is not their job to convince us of their validity. To think so is to make an idol of our own logic.

Our story describes a time when we are oppressed by the idolatry of logic. This is a state when we have let truths matter chiefly because we

understand them, not because the Lord says them. If you seek meaning from your own intellect and will, you are trapped. No truth seems dependable (because we can assemble other truths to defeat it), and we lose our way because any disagreeable truth we encounter we can just declare ‘unreasonable’ or ‘it doesn’t make sense’, and so we have nothing (AC 627). If we decide what is true, what keeps us from deciding the opposite is true? Idolatry of logic robs us of the Lord’s power; we can’t fight temptations if we don’t rely on the Lord’s truths, and we can’t submit to the Lord’s truths if we only treat them as reasonable ideas (CL 232).

Our story opens with Jabin, king of the Canaanites, oppressing Israel. Canaanites, when they run rampant, show us preferring external things, empty things, over meaning and significance and principle. If we decide what is true, what is logical, then no idea is capital ‘T’ true, and we have to provide all the authority – which we can’t. On his own, Jabin is a life of ‘going-through-the-motions’, being in a rut, a life of weight loss and utility bills and human prudence – a quietly miserable life (AC 1167). Any truth that asks us to be more is ‘unpalatable’, and Jabin demands we reject it.

Jabin keeps us oppressed through his general, Sisera. He commands 900 chariots of iron, so we know he commands all the natural facts of life, all the little arguments we tell ourselves to keep ourselves oppressed: ‘I’m too busy’; ‘Nobody else thinks this’; ‘It don’t know how it works’. He keeps us from a life of reflection and interior joy. Sisera is not the natural facts of life, but the faculty of justification, our ability to arrange data – and truths - to suit ourselves (AC 3391, AR 501).

So what does the Lord send us? He sends us a judge, a hero, an idea that will free us from the idolatry of our own logic: Deborah. She is described as a ‘wife of naggidoth’, which is not the name of her husband, but a mysterious word meaning ‘torches’ or ‘shining’ or some other flame-like notion. In a culture where women were usually defined by the men they married, Deborah is married to fire. Also, whereas everyone else in the

story is given a local, tribal identity, Deborah is described as a ‘mother in Israel’ – a title given to no other woman in the Word. She is neither Naphtalite nor Canaanite nor Kenite, and she has no children mentioned. Imagine Barak, a man of war, hearing that ‘Deborah, wife of fire, mother in Israel’ is coming to speak with him.

Finally, she is actively described as ‘judging’ – a rare function normally associated with Moses and Samuel, the two most important non-royal leaders in the Old Testament. This was a woman used to settling disputes and issuing orders. She spoke for the Lord.

In chapter five she calls forth the power of Divine Good, and the power of heaven in natural things (AC 2781, 4240). In Deborah we are reminded that the truth is not ours, that the Word is the awesome living truth, that the Lord is not the Lord because He ‘makes sense’ but because He is the source of reality – including our ability to see the truth – to see anything, really. Deborah, as the heavenly within the natural (AC 4240), is the gift of awe; our ability to glimpse the Divine, to see something much greater than ourselves and revere it.

Deborah commands Barak to raise an army and battle Sisera, but he demurs, demanding Deborah go with him as a condition of his help. She agrees but warns him that his lack of courage means that Barak will not secure the final victory, a woman will.

Barak’s name means ‘lightning’, the ability of truth to shine in our lives. While this is a wonderful and even vital element in our lives, the ability of truth to shine in our lives cannot defeat justification. We all know that truth can be twisted to serve our own desires and seeing the power of truth is no defense against us claiming those truths as our own to dispose as we see fit. For example, the truth that Hell is eternal is not convincing if we refuse to be convinced – and the Lord will not force us to see this truth against our will. Barak is correct that he cannot defeat Sisera without Deborah – we

need to bring the respect and awe we feel towards the authority of the Word (AC 4241).

In the ensuing battle, Barak does defeat the Canaanite army of Jabin lead by Sisera, despite all the iron chariots. The Canaanites are our loud, external lives that can spin out of control while Barak and the Israelites are the life of principle and religion, a life governed by reflection, purpose, and humility. We know truth has the power to dispel falsities, and his victory is just that; if we choose, truth can govern our natural lives. Consider our realization that we pay bills or shop for food in order to serve the neighbor, not ourselves. We may forget this truth, but when called to mind, spiritual truth can govern our loud, natural lives if we let it.

But Sisera escapes. We are still under threat of the idolatry of logic. Just because we lead a life of principles does not mean we don't claim those principles as of our own design.

This brings us to Jael, who shows us how the Lord wants us to overcome justification and the idolatry of logic: by worship, innocence, and simple truths.

After being defeated, Sisera comes to Jael's tent as an ally. She welcomes him in. He asks for water, and she offers him milk. Then while he sleeps, she kills him with a tent spike.

Let's examine Jael more closely. As neither Canaanite nor Israelite, she is the simple truth that we know we have mixed motives and affections that make some truths more appealing than others and the humility we have when we acknowledge this. We may love to tell the truth, but for all the right reasons? Certainly not. We may feel joy at sharing what we have, but there is always a darker collection of desires clinging to those noble aims. Jael is us, trying to do the basic right thing while realizing we have a jumble of motivations – or justifications – in the back of our mind. Why do you brush your teeth? Why do you pass the salt? Why



do you hug your children? Jael just knows that we do.

Imagine this common woman, during a time of war and conflict and shifting loyalties, greeting a defeated but dangerous general at her tent. What should she do? What should we do? Don't argue with him, don't fight with him, don't think you can defeat your own ability to twist things. Jael in her tent, offering milk, shows us that we should welcome justification with innocence, even humility (AC 1616). We should admit that yes – we twist things and always will. We have to keep this ability, and we need it for freedom and rationality.

Don't fight justification – lull it to sleep. Welcome it into your tent – this is being humble in worship, acknowledging we always twist truths.

Offer justification the milk of innocence, the willingness to follow what the Lord says and not focus on what we prefer or think. When we find ourselves twisting and turning, denying unpleasant truths, pause and note, and watch the justification happen. 'Huh – so I'm doing that.'

Admit we see it differently than the Word, admit that we see it two or three different ways. Admit that we are fundamentally irrational and yet lovable. How terrible and terrifying it can be to see this in ourselves, but take a good look. Sisera is in the tent, and we can't defeat him, not if we play his game of rationalizations and logic. The Lord knows this is uncomfortable, He knows it will be upsetting, but stick with humility and innocence. Rather than waste energy on exploring and explaining all your reasons and why you aren't at fault and why it matters, put it aside. Focus instead on following the Lord. You don't need to explain why you do that.

When Jael puts a tent spike through Sisera, say, 'I'm not in charge'. We can still rationalize and justify. We will still disagree and prefer some truths over others. Let that be. If we can summon our awe for the Divine and simply and humbly listen to the Lord in His Word and just understand what we

understand and try to do it, we will be living the life the Lord wants.

After Sisera is dead Barak shows up at the tent, truth visiting after falsity. If you accept, for example, that Hell is eternal, your acceptance of this truth will lead you to new truths and a better understanding of the Lord. Logic will only get us so far – living the truth in humility, as best we can, brings enlightenment (SS 57). Israel is free – we are free to live the truth we understand – even if we don't like it - and to rest our happiness in obedience to the Lord's. This happiness will not run out (DP 311).

In closing, logic is a powerful gift from the Lord. If we take our ability to reason, however, enslave it to our own preferences, and use it to erode our own conviction in the Lord's Word, insisting that we decide what is true, we will be miserable, and we will spread that misery. The solution is to cooperate with the Lord in three steps: We acknowledge the Divine and feel awe – this is Deborah. We then chase falsities away with truths linked to that awe – this is Barak. Finally, we dispose of the power of false justifications, not with reason, but with simple obedience and innocence, and discover new truths in the process.

*I have not departed from Your judgments, For You
Yourself have taught me.*

*How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter
than honey to my mouth!*

*Through Your precepts I get understanding;
Therefore I hate every false way.*

(Psalm 119: 102-104)

Amen

Lessons: Judges 4 (portions)
AC 8753

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So the Lord sold Israel into the hands of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. Sisera, the commander of his army, was based in Harosheth Haggoyim. Because he had nine hundred chariots fitted with iron and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the Lord for help.

Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, “The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: ‘Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.’”

Barak said to her, “If you go with me, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go.”

“Certainly I will go with you,” said Deborah. “But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.”

Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses’ brother-in-law,[b] and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaanannim near Kedesh.

At Barak’s advance, the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword.

Sisera, meanwhile, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was an alliance between Jabin king of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite. 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 covered him with a blanket. “I’m thirsty,” he said. “Please give me some water.” She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up.

“Stand in the doorway of the tent,” he told her. “If someone comes by and asks you, ‘Is anyone in there?’ say ‘No.’”

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.

AC 8753: Explaining Judges chapter 5:

‘In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the ways ceased, and they that walked in paths went through crooked ways, the roads ceased in Israel; they ceased until I Deborah arose, until I arose a mother in Israel.’ (Judg. 5:4-7)

The subject treated of in this prophetic song, which is the song of Deborah and Barak, is the perversion of the truth of the church, and its restitution. The story is about the perversion of the church’s truth and restored by Divine authority from good attached to truth.