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BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS

She Nailed It

Just a Thought • Judges 4:22

By John L. Wheeler

“Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking.”

—Judges 4:22, ESV

Jael spoke those words to Barak after she had killed Sisera in her tent. They are a remarkably brief invitation after an extraordinary act.

Years ago, when I first read this story, Jael’s actions caught my attention. But it was the song in Judges 5 that stayed with me—the repeated description of Sisera falling, ending with the unmistakable declaration that he was dead.

Israel had once again turned away from God. Oppression followed, then a cry for help. It is a familiar pattern in Judges, along with God’s repeated mercy toward his wayward people.

Deborah was the judge. Barak led ten thousand men into battle. But Deborah had told him that the honor would belong to a woman: God would deliver Sisera into her hand.

That woman was Jael.

When Sisera fled the battle, he sought refuge in her tent. There was peace between his king, Jabin, and the household of Heber, Jael’s husband. He had reason to believe he had reached safety.

I wonder what she thought when she saw him.

Did she already know his face? Did his clothing identify him? Did he tell her who he was? Scripture does not say.

She welcomed him, covered him, and gave him milk when he asked for water. He instructed her to conceal his presence. Exhausted, he fell asleep.

When did she decide?

We are given no explanation from Jael. She took a tent peg and a hammer, approached him quietly, and drove the peg through his temple into the ground.

Scripture does not introduce her as a trained warrior. Yet she carried out an act that would require extraordinary resolve from anyone—a spine of steel and a determined mind.

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Then she had to face what she had done.

The narrative moves directly to Barak's arrival. We are not told how much time passed between those events. But the brevity of the account cannot make the scene itself a small thing.

I know something about that.

Years ago, as a member of a hospital code team, I was called to a bathroom where a man had suffered a fatal gunshot wound to the head. I still remember the room, the actions I took, the words spoken, and the smell of blood. That experience has never left me.

I do not recount it here to dwell on its details. I mention it because I cannot read about Jael and imagine that the moment ended when the hammer stopped.

Sisera was dead in her tent. Whatever time elapsed, she was there with the consequences of her decision.

Did her hands tremble before she struck? Did they tremble afterward? Was she frightened by what she had done, relieved that it was over, or already listening for someone approaching?

We cannot know. My memory cannot tell me what was in her mind. It does, however, make me pause where the narrative moves on.

Then Jael stepped outside to meet Barak.

What was in her voice when she invited him into the tent? He was about to see the outcome. She had carried out the act and remained with its aftermath.

Deborah's prophecy was fulfilled. God's providence had worked through the judge's words, the army's victory, and Jael's decisive action. Israel continued to prevail against Jabin until his kingdom was destroyed, and the song closes with forty years of rest.

I read that song with gratitude for Israel's deliverance. But I also find myself thinking about the woman in the tent, whose thoughts Scripture leaves unrecorded.

Just a thought.

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