



THE CHURCH OF THE
RESURRECTION
WASHINGTON, DC

**“The Church and Her Children, Judges 4”
by Shawn Honey**

MOTHER CHURCH & THE WAR OF THE SEEDS

Mother Church. The Church is the Mother of believers. I want to tell you a story this evening about Mother Church, and to tell it we have to go back to the beginning. In the beginning God wanted a people for himself. He put a Father and a Mother in a thin place—a place where they would have intimate communion with him. His plan was that the children of our first Mother would rule and subdue the earth in his wisdom, taking this thin place of intimacy with him and spreading it from one end of creation to the other until all chaos would be crushed under their feet.

But very early on our Mother and her man fell into sin. The Serpent—this personal, spiritual force of evil—deceived our Mother and her man, telling them that if they followed his path, they would be like God and would not need him in their work of ruling the creation. But the funny thing is, they were already like God; they were his image bearers. But not content with being mirrors of God’s light, they wanted to become sources of light—but became only darkness. Those who were supposed to rule became the ruled. The thin place was gone, and in its place a barrier. And it looked like they would be forever under the foot of their Serpent enemy.

But God had a plan. He promised our Mother that she would give birth to a Seed—to children who would war against the Serpent and ultimately, one day, crush the Serpent’s skull. But the Serpent himself would also have a seed. The Mother would continue to give birth to children who would again and again fall prey to the Serpent’s deceiving words. This would be part of the curse she would bear. God had told her, “I will *multiply* your pain in child-bearing.” So this Mother would forever see her children divided into two—those who would align themselves with God’s wisdom and those who would forever grasp at the heels of and trip up the righteous Seed.

And very early on, the two Seeds emerge. Our Mother gave birth to two sons, and the unrighteous one killed the righteous one. Cain killed Abel. And our Mother tasted the bitterness of her curse—the gravity of her pain in bringing up children in a world of sin.

And the conflict of the Seeds continued; sometimes one gaining ground, and then the other. And when it looked like the Seed of the Serpent would at last prevail, God raised up Abraham and his wife Sarah. Her Seed would be *the Seed* to crush the Enemy’s head. But first Mother Sarah’s seed Isaac would have to establish himself against Hagar’s seed Ishmael.



THE CHURCH OF THE
RESURRECTION
WASHINGTON, DC

And then Isaac married Rebekah, and in her sons the war of the Seeds would manifest itself again. It would be through Rebekah's son Jacob, not her son Esau, that God's promise of the conquering Seed would be kept.

And Jacob, Rebekah's son, very early on in his life had a dream. God showed him a vision of a ladder stretching from heaven to earth, with angels ascending and descending. This was a thin place of divine communion. And God promised Jacob that his Seed would bring deliverance. And Jacob named that place Bethel, house of God, because God visited him there and gave a foretaste in that place of what was coming for all places—all of creation would become Bethel, the house of God, a thin place of divine-human communion.

But the Mothers of Jacob's children would once again bitterly taste the curse. Leah's sons would harbor rebellion. And Rachel, from the hard labor of giving birth to her second son, would succumb to death, but not before saying, "Call him Ben-Oni," which means "son of my sorrow." The boy, though, would bear a different name—Benjamin—son of the right hand. But Rachel's dying words echo a life of witnessing and bearing the curse—seeing the war of the Seeds among her husband's children, longing for a Deliverer. Rachel died and was buried at a place called Ramah.

And the story advances with Mother after Mother giving birth to seed after seed—some godly, some not. One famous Mother is Ruth, the great-grandmother of King David. It would ultimately be her Seed who would bring relief from the curse.

And that Seed would be born from another famous Mother, Mary. Her Son, our Lord Jesus, would in himself be a thin place—the intersection of heaven and earth, of God and man—and he would restore our lost oneness with God. But not before he himself would taste the curse. On the cross he tasted the bitterness of broken fellowship with God, but on that same cross, which was planted into a hill called Golgotha, which means the place of the skull, the place of the skull, the place of the skull (Let the hearer understand!)—he crushed the skull of the Serpent, just like God had promised our Mother in the beginning.

And from Jesus' pierced side, speared by a soldier as he hung dead on the cross, flowed blood and water. Blood and water. Jesus gave birth. To the Church—this Mother of his people, marked out by the water of baptism and partaking of his blood in the meal of communion. This Mother, the Church, would be tasked with raising up for God the kind of sons and daughters he had always longed for—children who would occupy a thin place like Bethel but who would also stretch that thin place into the painful Ramahs of creation, where the tyranny of the Serpent is still lived.



THE CHURCH OF THE
RESURRECTION
WASHINGTON, DC

That's the story of Mother Church from beginning to now. But let's tell another story of Mother Church from the middle, the story of Judges 4. And let's tell our story in the tale of Mother Church. Because even for us the war of the seeds, though won on the cross, is still being waged. And the Serpent's seed, though defeated on the cross, still persists—even in the Church. Even in this church.

THE CYCLE OF JUDGES

In Judges 4, the refrain is by now familiar: **And the people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD after Ehud died.** This is the cycle of the book. The people give in to the Serpent's lies, and they become enslaved, longing for a deliverer. **And 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. 3 Then the people of Israel cried out to the LORD for help, for he had 900 chariots of iron and he oppressed the people of Israel cruelly for twenty years.**

Before, under the last oppressor, the duration was 18 years; this time it's 20. Do you see a pattern? And get this pattern, too: The deliverance after the last oppressor endured 80 years. This time it will only endure 40 years. Things are spiraling downward.

Now, when Dan preached before, he asked you to imagine where you were 18 years ago and to imagine only just now being freed from an oppression that began back then. I want you to imagine that today is the beginning of 20 years of oppression for you. 20 years. 1 year is too long under the thumb of Jabin, so my hope is that you will heed the call of Mother Church tonight. Because it doesn't have to be freedom in 20 years. It can be freedom for you now.

MOTHER DEBORAH

But where is Mother Church in our story tonight? She's holding court, just where she always should be, between the thin place and the place of suffering. She's sitting between Bethel (remember Jacob's thin place?) and Ramah (the place where Rachel died in her struggle to birth the seed). **Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. 5 She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment.** Deborah "arose as a mother in Israel" (Judges 5.7), and she's doing what all faithful Mothers in Israel were called to do, what Mother Church is called to do, and what all mothers in the Church are called to do—raise up godly Seed—whether they are their own children or not.



THE CHURCH OF THE
RESURRECTION
WASHINGTON, DC

THE SERPENT'S SEED, THEN & NOW

Now, before we look at Deborah's children, let's look at the Serpent's children in our tale. Jabin, king of Canaan and Sisera, his right-hand man. Now, Jabin is just a generic title that Canaanite kings took. Sisera gets the attention in this tale. And this principle was true then, and it's true now: The Serpent's tactics may have the appearance of being a new thing—Sisera is the new commander. But behind the veneer of newness is the same old generic lie of the Serpent—you will be like gods, if you will just follow me.

But what were the lies the people of Israel had believed that got them sold into the hand of Jabin? The age-old lies of power and pleasure. The fruit of that first tree that our Mother took hold of was a delight to the eyes and would make one wise, remember? The Canaanite religion promised the same—the power of connection to the divine and the enduring...in the context of saying yes to every pleasure, sexual and otherwise.

And is the religion of our age any different? Power—to have that impressive name and title, to speak the right set of shibboleths, to have wealth and capital. And you must not be denied any pleasure—especially sexual; it would be unnatural. His name isn't Sisera today, but it's still Jabin pulling the strings. And as then, so now: If you insist on worshiping their gods, you will become enslaved to their gods, and before you know it you've lost 20 years to the iron teeth of the Serpent.

And it's into this context of slavery under Jabin that Deborah, this Mother in Israel, this type of Mother Church, is raising up children—children for action at long last against the Serpent. And who are the children of Mother Deborah? There are three we see in this text: The fearful, the faithless, and the furious. The fearful, the faithless, and the furious.

MOTHER CHURCH'S FEARFUL CHILDREN

First, there is the fearful. **[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. 7 And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops, and I will give him into your hand'?" 8 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."**

"Barak, it's time. You've sat under my instruction year after year for this moment." Through Mother Church, God says, 'Go. I will give the enemy into your hands.'" But Barak is afraid. Mt. Tabor is, geographically, a potential death trap. Barak and his men could easily be



THE CHURCH OF THE
RESURRECTION
WASHINGTON, DC

surrounded and slaughtered with no way of escape. "If you will go with me, I will go, but if you will not go with me, I will not go."

Children of the Church, this is the voice of fear: "This fight *feels* impossible...I can't do it." The temptations of power and pleasure, in our day, have a seemingly impenetrable armor. Their thunder is so loud, their onslaught is so dizzying, that even though we may want to fight, it feels like sticks against iron. So maybe tomorrow. Maybe next year.

But you are not alone. There were 10,000 with Barak, and here there are 10,000 and more with you. And the LORD is on your side, and he wants to reproduce in you, his fearful sons and daughters, that victory against the rusty shell of false power and pleasure that he accomplished in his Son Jesus. Ah, the fearful.

MOTHER CHURCH'S FAITHLESS CHILDREN

Meanwhile, there is also the faithless. The Faithless. Verse 11: **Now Heber the Kenite had separated from the Kenites, the descendants of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaananim, which is near Kedesh.** And verse 17 tells us **there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite.** Peace between Jabin and Heber. Here is one attached to Israel, attached to Mother Church, but who has made a pact with the Serpent.

Children of the church, this is the voice of faithlessness: "This fight *is* impossible, so I will not engage." Instead, I will baptize power and pleasure in Israel and in Mother Church, and I will enjoy the friendship of God *and* of the Serpent. But you cannot serve God and Money. You cannot take the Temple of God, your body, and unite it with the world with impunity.

Now, this faithlessness takes different forms on the right and on the left. On the right, lip service is paid to saying no to sexual immorality (at least of a certain kind) but when it comes to power and wealth, Mother Church is allowed no voice in my ambitions and my portfolio. And on the left, it's lip service to the condemnation of power (at least of a certain kind), but Mother Church's voice when it comes to sexual immorality is mocked as an archaic, unrealistic relic from an oppressive past.

But this is what Mother Church, echoing her Bridegroom Christ, says to both: **Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral...nor the greedy will inherit the kingdom of God. 1 Co. 6.** If you try to tame the Serpent, he will swallow you whole. Every god is all or nothing. Every god. Power and pleasure will not stop until they have ruined you. But God would have all of you—not to consume you but to make you a partaker in a kingdom that encompasses all



THE CHURCH OF THE
RESURRECTION
WASHINGTON, DC

power and glory—seated with Christ at God’s right hand, where there are pleasures forevermore.

MOTHER CHURCH’S FEARFUL CHILDREN, RISING UP TO FIGHT

While faithlessness sits in compromise, fearful still gets up to fight. In verse 12, the enemy Sisera is drawn out against Barak. He and his men should be easy prey against iron chariots. Verse 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?”** The next chapter seems to indicate that there was some sort of flash flood that caused the Kishon river to break its banks miring Sisera’s iron chariots in the mud. God has at his disposal all things against what would master you. At any rate, **all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left.** Except for Sisera himself who fled away on foot, but we’ll revisit him in a minute.

Fearful children of the church, God knows your fear, and yet he still wants to use you. But know this: There is a real loss of glory in our hesitation against the gods of power and pleasure. Deborah herself had warned Barak after he had said, “I’m not going unless my demands are met.” **“I will 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.”**

I used to think that God would get it done whether I acted or not. He’s powerful despite my fear, right? He is gracious despite my failings, right? Yes and yes. But God is actually a great respecter of our will, and so there are real consequences from both our action and our inaction.

You get the sense that Barak should have done this thing years ago. He’d been listening to Mother Deborah his whole life. And she says to him, “Hasn’t the LORD commanded you? Isn’t the Lord with you? Go.”

I’ve seen Christians miss out on years of growth because of the inaction of fear. Will God be reliable if I venture into that frightful place of trusting him in the fight? You’re not alone. Go. He is with you and we the Church are with you. The power of fear can end today.

MOTHER CHURCH’S FURIOUS CHILDREN

Which brings us to Mother Deborah’s third child—the furious. The furious. Sisera the Canaanite is on the run. His days are numbered, but maybe—just maybe—there’s a haven somewhere still in Israel, in Mother Church, where he can hide. And that’s when he meets up with Jael.

Jael the furious. For too long the oppression of Canaanite religion had run rampant in the camps of Israel. And for decades now, Jabin’s servants have been living quite comfortably in the tents of Mother Church.



THE CHURCH OF THE
RESURRECTION
WASHINGTON, DC

But Jael had had enough. “Yes, Sisera, come on in.” **Then she went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple until it went down into the ground.** “Yes, Sisera, come on in. This is where Serpents have their skulls crushed.”

That is the only word of Mother Church to the Serpent’s false promises of power and pleasure—death. But still we think it’s ok if we grant them just some tiny bit of quarter. This relationship is *just* for a season. This is *just* how my life has to be if I’m ever to advance. And we come to this Table, sick with the poison of self-justified vies for power and pleasure.

Children of the Church, it’s time for us to get furious. Now, this text describes on one level a literal wartime scenario, and you’re reading about the sorts of military actions that Israel had to do to get free, much like you would read about the battles of World War 2. In that military sense this text has no application for the Church today because we, the Church, are not and never will be a nation at war.

But don’t think that for the ancient Israelites reading this—that they would miss a far deeper application. It’s time to get furious. Not with the Siseras *out there* but with the Siseras *in here*, because it was Israel—remember?—who had done evil in the sight of the Lord, and it is we the Church who for too long have bowing down to Canaanite gods.

I’ve had too many conversations with too many Christians who so nonchalantly and sometimes quite sophisticatedly play with venom. And I’m not talking about the struggle we all face every day against temptation. I’m talking about a full-on plunge into the power and pleasure of Canaan and the demand that Mother Church baptize it. We crave networks more than faithfulness and our romantic endeavors follow a script any Canaanite would gladly embrace. This cannot be. Where is our fury?

THE SKULL-CRUSHER’S CALL TO FREEDOM

You know, in the next chapter there’s a full list of whole tribes in Israel who missed out on the victory won by Barak and Jael under the guidance of Mother Deborah. For one reason or another—whether it was fear or full-on compromise—God acted and they were left behind. For all your talent, for all your connections, all your skill, and all your professional experience; for all your invocations of God’s name, what if you miss out because the Serpent has you by the heels?

But on behalf of Mother Church, standing between the painful Ramahs of the world that you’re trying to escape and the transcendent Bethels that you’re longing to attain, I’m not inviting you into despair and shame tonight. That can end. Tonight. I’m inviting you into hope and freedom. To have your godless ambitions and addictions be crushed tonight. That’s why



THE CHURCH OF THE
RESURRECTION
WASHINGTON, DC

Mother Church is here. Between the thin place and the painful place—to introduce you or to restore you to God the Father through Jesus Christ the Skull-crusher.

Though you've been faithless for a time, put your faith in him tonight. Though you've been plagued by fear, here in the Church Jesus has supplied the strength to fight. And let him share with you his fury against the Serpent whose skull felt the piercing peg of his cross. Don't lose one more hour to Canaanite oppression.

Mother Deborah. Her name means "bee," and someone once said, she had honey for her friends and a stinger for her enemies. Where are you today, children of the Church, in the cycle of Judges? Are you spiraling down, or are you calling on the Lord for deliverance? If you feel the sting of Ramah, don't continue the downward spiral into worse and worse oppression. Come to the thin place—the fearful, the faithless, and the furious—and taste the honey of Mother Church—the good news of Jesus Christ the Skull-crusher.