

Who was Jael in the Bible?

Jael in the Bible was the wife of a man named Heber, who was a Kenite. The Kenites were related to the Midianites. Jael features in the book of Judges as a heroic woman who killed Sisera, the leader of King Jabin's Canaanite army. Jabin was trying to conquer Israel, which was at that time under the leadership of Deborah, a prophetess and the only female to judge the nation of Israel.

When Sisera and his army came against Israel, Deborah sent word to Barak of the tribe of Naphtali that he was to fight the Canaanites and deliver Israel from Jabin's hand. Barak was unwilling to go into battle without Deborah by his side. Deborah agreed to go with him but told him that, because of his reticence, a woman would get the honor of killing Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army (Judges 4:4-7).

As the Israelites were winning the battle, as prophesied by Deborah, Sisera left his decimated army at the Kishon River and fled on foot (Judges 4:16-17). He came to Heber's property and sought refuge there, knowing that Heber was in alliance with King Jabin. Heber's wife, Jael, welcomed Sisera with the words "Come, my lord, come right in. Don't be afraid" (Judges 4:18). She brought Sisera into her tent, covered him with a blanket, and gave him some milk to drink (verses 18-19). Jael was kind and hospitable, but she had an ulterior motive. After Sisera had eaten well and was asleep, Jael took a tent peg and a mallet and sneaked up on Sisera. She placed the tent peg's point on his temple and hit the peg with the mallet, driving it through his temple with such force that it stuck in the ground on the other side of his head. Thus Sisera died (Judges 4:21).

Deborah's prophecy was fulfilled: the honor of killing the captain of Jabin's army went to a woman. That woman was Jael. As Barak pursued Sisera, he came to Heber's settlement.

Jael went to meet him and brought him into the tent to show him what she had done—Sisera's body was lying there with a tent peg in his temple (Judges 4:22). Later, Barak and Deborah sang a song of the battle, and in the song they honored Jael by name:

“Most blessed of women be Jael,

the wife of Heber the Kenite,

most blessed of tent-dwelling women.

He asked for water, and she gave him milk;

in a bowl fit for nobles she brought him curdled milk.

Her hand reached for the tent peg,

her right hand for the workman's hammer.

She struck Sisera, she crushed his head,

she shattered and pierced his temple.

At her feet he sank,

he fell; there he lay.

At her feet he sank, he fell;

where he sank, there he fell—dead” (Judges 5:24-27).