

Willing Servants
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Judges 4:4-10,12-16

Opening discussion: Who was the strongest, wisest woman you've known in your life? I mean the kind of woman that everyone seemed to turn to and depend on when they were in a jam? What was she like? What can you tell us about her?

- In this lesson we'll see another example of how God supernaturally rescued and restored His people after they had rebelled against Him.
- It's the story of a strong, wise, and godly woman named Deborah; and a godly, but timid general named Barak.

The big idea: God uses faithful and willing servants to rescue and restore His people. Sometimes those willing servants are NOT who we expect.

- To set the stage, after two judges led them through 80 years of peace, *"the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord."* (4:1)
- We've learned about the "cycle of rebellion" of the children of Israel. **In your own words what was the cycle of rebellion they kept repeating?**
- 4:2 says, *"So the Lord sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan..."*
- Jabin was the evil king, but the real villain in this story is Jabin's general, Sisera. Verse three tells us Sisera had oppressed Israel for twenty years.
- Israel had foot soldiers with swords. Sisera had 900 chariots.
- Verse three: Once again, *"...the children of Israel cried out to the Lord."*
- God raised up a leader He would use to rescue and restore his people.

Judges 4:4-5 (NLT)

⁴ Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, was a prophet who was judging Israel at that time. ⁵ She would sit under the Palm of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites would go to her for judgment.

- Deborah's name meant, "honey bee" and she was the queen of the hive!
- **Why was it significant back then that Deborah was a judge?**
- **How do we know she was doing more than just settling lawsuits?**
- Moses' sister Miriam was a prophetess (Ex. 15:20); and later biblical history introduces us to Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Noadiah (Neh. 6:14), Anna (Luke 2:36), and the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9).¹
- It's clear Deborah's gift of prophecy enabled her to interpret the law of Moses and the will of God.
- Not only was Deborah a prophetess and judge, according to 5:7, she saw herself as the "mother" of Israel.
- **How does the story of Deborah destroy some stereotypes about how God calls leaders? What does that fact that God chose Deborah for this role say about the men in Israel? What can we learn from this?**
- Truth: God can use anyone He chooses to accomplish His purposes, even a person some might see as an unlikely servant.
- Sometimes a situation calls for a strong, godly "mom" to focus everyone on God's plan and get them moving. Deborah was that kind of leader!
- Verse six: One day Deborah sent for Barak, a talented general in Israel.
- She told Barak that God commanded him to call out 10,000 warriors and head to Mount Tabor. Then God said He would send Sisera (the evil Canaanite general) and his army to the river at the bottom of the mountain. Barak and his army would run down the mountain and God would give them the victory over Sisera's army.
- Now, Barak's men were on foot with swords. Sisera has a bigger army and 900 chariots with spikes on the wheels to roll over those soldiers.

- So, of course, Barak said: *“We’re on it! No problem, we’ve got this!”* Nope.
- Barak told her, *“I will go, but only if you go with me.”*
- Scripture doesn’t tell us why Barak wanted Deborah to go along for the battle. **What would you speculate might be his reasons? Why was this a weak response? In whom was Barak placing his trust?**
- Deborah said, *“Okay, I will go with you. But you will receive no honor in this venture, for the Lord’s victory over Sisera will be at the hands of a woman.”* (It’s not the woman you may think! More on that later.)
- This is significant. **Why didn’t Deborah just say, “Never mind, you big coward, I’ll lead the troops myself?” How did her actions model God’s plan for the roles of men and women?**
- Let’s be fair to Barak. He may come off as a weak-kneed leader. The fact is there is no evidence that he lacked the ability to fight a war, or that he lacked commitment to God. Hebrews 11:32 indicates he had great faith!
- Where Barak came up short was thinking God wouldn’t give him the victory unless Deborah as in the camp. He was like Linus with his blanket.
- Truth: It’s great to depend on the counsel of wise, godly people; but it’s God who gives us the victory!
- So, Barak called 10,000 warriors to battle and Deborah went with him.
- God whispered in Sisera’s ear that Barak had gone up to Mount Tabor.
- So Sisera called for all 900 of his iron chariots and all of his warriors, and they marched to the Kishon River. (Chariots beside a river. Stay tuned.)
- Deborah said to Barak, *“Get ready! This is the day the Lord will give you victory over Sisera, for the Lord is marching ahead of you.”*
- Deborah didn’t say, “I hope God will come through.” She didn’t review the facts to encourage Barak. That would have been discouraging! She simply repeated to Him what God had promised. We all need someone in our corner who will remind us about the promised of God.

- The ESV and KJV say that Deborah said “UP!” The NIV renders it “GO!” Either way, it’s clear she pushed Barak out the door and said get going!
- So Barak led his 10,000 warriors down the mountain into battle.
- **When we do what God tells us to do, what does God always do?**
- When Barak attacked, the Lord threw Sisera and all his chariots and warriors into a panic. Not only did God confuse Sisera and his army, He took care of those 900 chariots. Remember, they were fighting by a river?
- Chapter five indicates God sent a huge storm that caused the Kishon River to overflow its banks. Chariots don’t roll very well in the mud.
- The evil general Sisera leaped down from his chariot and escaped on foot.
- Barak chased the chariots and the enemy army killing all of Sisera’s warriors. Not a single one was left alive.
- As promised by **Deborah ... the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and army**. The means used by God were both human (by the sword) and divine (bringing an unseasonable and violent storm that mired the chariots in the floodwaters of the Kishon; cf. 5:20–22).²
- As we said, if we’ll do what God calls us to do (our part), He will supernaturally take care of the victory (His part.) He did just that!
- What happened to the evil general Sisera after he escaped? I can’t leave you hanging. Sisera was on the run and he went to a village of nomads who lived in tents. A woman named Jael offered to hide him in her tent.
- He was weary so she gave him warm blankets and warm milk.
- That will make you doze off. Then once he was snoring, Jael took a tent peg and a sledgehammer and pounded that peg through the side of his head pinning him to the ground, dead!
- As Deborah told Barak, God used a woman to take care of evil Sisera.
- By the way, after the battle, Deborah and Barak wrote a hit worship song about their adventure. You can read it on your own in chapter five.

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- We said God uses faithful and willing servants to rescue and restore His people. Sometimes those willing servants are NOT who we expect.
- **How can we (both men and women) be more like Deborah?**
- **What can we learn from Barak's part of this story?**
- This lesson should be an encouragement to the ladies and a wake-up call for the men. God will accomplish His purposes one way or another, even if we men don't step up as the spiritual leaders we're called to be!
- Thank God for those brave, godly women who give us men the PUSH we need from time to time.
- **What did we learn about trusting God when we're facing a battle?**
- Our job is to do everything He has commanded us to do (our part), and the trust in our hearts knowing He will do what only HE can do (His part.)

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1994). *Be available* (p. 35). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

² Lindsey, F. D. (1985). Judges. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 389). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.