



Session 9

WILLING SERVANTS

God restores His people to freedom using faithful and willing servants.

JUDGES 4:4-10,12-16

⁴ Deborah, a woman who was a prophetess and the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. ⁵ It was her custom to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her for judgment. ⁶ She summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, “Hasn’t the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you: ‘Go, deploy the troops on Mount Tabor, and take with you 10,000 men from the Naphtalites and Zebulunites?’ ⁷ Then I will lure Sisera commander of Jabin’s forces, his chariots, and his army at the Wadi Kishon to fight against you, and I will hand him over to you.”



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.” 9 “I will go with you,” she said, “but you will receive no honor on the road you are about to take, because the LORD will sell Sisera into a woman’s hand.” So Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kadesh. 10 Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kadesh; 10,000 men followed him, and Deborah also went with him. [...] 12 It was reported to Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up Mount Tabor. 13 Sisera summoned all his 900 iron chariots and all the people who were with him from Harosheth of the Nations to the Wadi Kishon. 14 Then Deborah said to Barak, “Move on, for this is the day the LORD has handed Sisera over to you. Hasn’t the LORD gone before you?” So Barak came down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him. 15 The LORD threw Sisera, all his charioteers, and all his army into confusion with the sword before Barak. Sisera left his chariot and fled on foot. 16 Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth of the Nations, and the whole army of Sisera fell by the sword; not a single man was left.

Notice words and phrases that point to a partnership between Barak and Deborah. How did they strengthen each other to accomplish the task?

FIRST THOUGHTS

Running a marathon or half-marathon is a daunting challenge. The thought of pushing our bodies to endure the training is enough to keep most from giving it a second thought. It will hurt. You will need to train in nasty weather. If the weather is nasty the day of the run, you will not wait until the next perfect day. You will be sore the day after the event. You will wonder why you are doing it while running up the steepest hill in the race. Experts remind us that training with a group makes a difference. Knowing that someone else is willing to endure with you somehow lessens the pain. You are able to draw encouragement from one another because everyone is facing the same challenge.

Why does another person’s willingness to serve motivate us to act? How

does knowing someone else will work alongside us give us courage?

In the Book of Judges, we find a soldier needing some encouragement. Deborah was a faithful and willing servant of God. She was the only female judge in the Book of Judges. Barak [BAY rak], the military leader, had been given orders to do battle with King Jabin [JAY bin], but he failed to act. Deborah's willingness to accompany Barak gave him the courage to face a formidable foe and allowed both of them to be a part of God's plan to deliver Israel.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Social Order*

All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JUDGES 3:7–5:31

Judges 3:7-11 records the victory of Othniel [AHTH nih el], the first judge in the book. After Othniel's victory, the Israelites enjoyed 40 years of peace before the pattern of rebellion continued, as "the Israelites again did what was evil in the LORD's sight" (3:12). (See p. 87 for a discussion of the cycle of rebellion.) The Lord allowed Eglon, King of Moab, to oppress the Hebrews. When the Israelites repented (3:15), the Lord gave Ehud, a left-handed Benjaminite, as Israel's second judge. Ehud delivered his people from the Moabites when Eglon's attendants failed to recognize the fact that he, being left-handed, carried his sword on his right thigh. Eglon's attendants failed to inspect Ehud's right thigh, allowing him to enter into the king's presence with a concealed, 18-inch sword. Ehud promptly drew the sword and killed Eglon. The Hebrews enjoyed peace for 80 years after Ehud's exploits (3:30).

Eighty years later, the cycle of rebellion began again, and the Israelites needed another deliverer to save them from the Philistines. The Lord gave Shamgar [SHAM gahr], Israel's next judge (3:31). In the days of Shamgar, the Israelites deserted the main highways and "kept



to the side roads” (5:6) due to fear of the Philistines. Additionally, entire “villages were deserted” (5:7). Shamgar delivered his people with the use of an oxgoad, killing 600 Philistines. Farmers made oxgoads from small trees or tree limbs, approximately six feet in length, peeled of bark for preservation. Honing one end to a dull point, farmers used the tool to goad a stubborn ox, as the name indicates.

Next in the line of leadership was Deborah. In Deborah’s day, Israel suffered under the oppression of Jabin [JAY bin] of Hazor and his military commander, Sisera [SIS ur ruh]. The Israelites cried to God for help, and the Lord responded to their cry by using Deborah to lead them to victory over their oppressors.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

AN UPDATE REQUESTED (JUDG. 4:4-7)

VERSES 4-5

⁴ Deborah, a woman who was a prophetess and the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. ⁵ It was her custom to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her for judgment.

After the brief description of the judge Shamgar and his success (3:31), the Israelites again rebelled against the Lord (4:1). The Lord allowed His people to be oppressed for 20 years by Jabin, king of Canaan. Jabin, his army equipped with 900 iron chariots, treated the Hebrews harshly (4:3). The Hebrews repented, and the Lord gave them the judge Deborah.

Deborah is identified as ***a woman, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth*** [LAP ih dahth], and a judge. As a prophetess, she was God’s spokesperson to deliver His messages to the Israelites. Other Old Testament prophetesses were Miriam (Ex. 15:20), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Noadiah (Neh. 6:14), Isaiah’s wife (Isa. 8:3), and Anna (Luke 2:36). Like the male prophets, the prophetesses were spokespersons for God. Nothing is known about Deborah’s husband, Lappidoth. This is the only mention of him in Scripture. Nothing is said about children. Later, she is called “a mother in Israel” (5:7), but this probably refers to her mother-like role over Israel.

In addition to prophesying, Deborah **was judging Israel**. The word *judging* can refer to the kind of judging that hears cases and renders decisions. It can also refer to leading or governing. Leaders in ancient times sometimes served as judges in rendering verdicts and settling disputes (as did Moses, for example; see Ex. 18:16). **It was her custom to sit under the palm tree of Deborah**. Some see this as a place to which people brought their disputes.

Israel's judges served as judicial, religious, and military leaders. As we will see in the next verse, Deborah served as God's spiritual spokesperson to Barak [BAY rak], who was Israel's military leader.

VERSES 6-7

⁶ She summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "Hasn't the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you: 'Go, deploy the troops on Mount Tabor, and take with you 10,000 men from the Naphtalites and Zebulunites? ⁷ Then I will lure Sisera commander of Jabin's forces, his chariots, and his army at the Wadi Kishon to fight against you, and I will hand him over to you.'"

Deborah **summoned •Barak** and reminded him that the Lord had **commanded** him to **deploy the troops on Mount Tabor**. The word *summoned* implies authority that came from Deborah's calling as a prophetess for God. She delivered to Barak God's message, not her own ideas: **Hasn't the LORD ... commanded you?**

She reminded Barak of the Lord's promise to **lure Sisera**, the commander of Jabin's forces, along with his army, to **the Wadi Kishon** [KIGH shahn]. The word *wadi* describes a watercourse that is dry except in the rainy season. There, the Lord would hand Sisera over into Barak's hands (v. 13). Even though the Lord had promised to defeat Israel's enemy, Barak hesitated for reasons unrecorded.

Why is willingness to serve essential in the life of a faithful believer?

A DEAL STRUCK (JUDG. 4:8-10)

VERSE 8



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.”

Further hesitation can be read in Barak’s reply. He would go fight only if Deborah agreed to go with him. What prompted Barak’s hesitation? Was it cowardice? Was it failure to believe Deborah’s (and the Lord’s) assurance? We are not told. Regardless of the reason, Barak recognized Deborah’s status. We should read Barak’s reply not only as a plea for Deborah’s presence, but also as a plea for the presence of the Lord. Barak knew he needed God’s leadership and presence that he saw in Deborah. He had to muster an army against Sisera, who had 900 chariots. Barak’s army only had swords and spears to go against horses and chariots (v. 13).

VERSES 9-10

⁹ “I will go with you,” she said, “but you will receive no honor on the road you are about to take, because the LORD will sell Sisera into a woman’s hand.” So Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. ¹⁰ Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; 10,000 men followed him, and Deborah also went with him.

Deborah agreed to go with Barak. Her courage in going was essential to Barak’s willingness to undertake the task. Deborah is an example of how one person’s courage in taking a stand for God gives courage to others in similar situations.

Barak summoned the **10,000 men** from the tribes of **Zebulun and Naphtali**. (Judg. 5:14-15 indicates that additional soldiers came from the tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir [Manasseh], and Issachar.) Deborah also went with him. Her faith was strong; there was no hesitancy on her part in acting on the Lord’s command.

Due to Barak’s timid response to the Lord’s command, Deborah informed him that he would not be honored for the victory God would soon provide. Instead, the Lord would sell Sisera **into a woman’s hand**. Though Barak was the military commander, people would speak of Sisera’s defeat at the hands of a woman. At this point in the narrative, we might assume that Deborah was that woman, but we would be wrong. Judges 4:17-24 shows that a woman named Jael [JAY uhl] was responsible for killing Sisera.

God will not honor faithlessness. Nor will the Lord honor an unwillingness to serve Him. Faithfulness and willingness to serve are related in that our faithfulness moves us to service.

As Christians, we often face fearful situations and experience fear when God leads us to do something beyond our abilities. We can be assured that when God tells us to go, He goes with us. We are armed with the promise of God to be with us and to win the ultimate victory. Rather than place conditions on our obedience, we are to trust and obey.

In what kinds of situations do you need courage to take a stand for God? How does your fear or courage influence others?

What blessings might one forfeit due to unfaithfulness and unwillingness to serve God?

THE ORDERS ISSUED (JUDG. 4:12-14)

VERSES 12-14

¹² **It was reported to Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up Mount Tabor.** ¹³ **Sisera summoned all his 900 iron chariots and all the people who were with him from Harosheth of the Nations to the Wadi Kishon.** ¹⁴ **Then Deborah said to Barak, “Move on, for this is the day the LORD has handed Sisera over to you. Hasn’t the LORD gone before you?” So Barak came down from Mount Tabor with 10,000 men following him.**

Scouts **reported to Sisera**, Jabin’s military leader, and informed him that Barak **had gone up Mount Tabor**. Earlier, the Lord had promised Deborah and Barak that He would lure Sisera and his army to this exact location, promising to “hand him over to you” (v. 7). Located in the northeast section of the Jezreel Valley, Mount Tabor played a significant role in Israel’s history. It served as a boundary point between the tribes of Naphtali, Issachar, and Zebulun (Josh. 19:22). The Israelites, early in their history, probably worshiped there (Deut. 33:18-19). Although uncertain, Christian tradition identifies Mount Tabor as the place for the



transfiguration of Jesus.

Sisera commanded **his 900 iron chariots** and supporting army to move toward the Wadi Kishon and meet Deborah and Barak's forces. While archaeological evidence indicates that the people of Mesopotamia developed the chariot before 3000 B.C., the Egyptians had revolutionized chariotry. Under the capable scrutiny of Egyptian engineers, the chariot developed into an effective military machine greatly feared by opposing forces. For the Israelite army to attack iron chariots would be like sending infantry armed with outdated weapons against an army of tanks and supporting troops armed with the latest technology.

Deborah voiced no fear of Sisera's chariots. Issuing Barak a command, she told him to **"Move on, for this is the day the LORD has handed Sisera over to you."** So sure of victory, Deborah insisted that the Lord had gone before him. The Lord not only goes with us but also goes before us. Too often we decide what we will do and then ask God to bless our efforts. Instead, we should find out where God is going and go with Him. Genuine faith involves following God where He leads. Bolstered by Deborah's faith and presence, and to his credit, Barak advanced on Mount Tabor with 10,000 men.

How did Deborah's assurance of God's presence bolster Barak's willingness? How does the assurance of God's presence give a believer confidence?

THE VICTORY WON (JUDG. 4:15-16)

VERSES 15-16

¹⁵ **The LORD threw Sisera, all his charioteers, and all his army into confusion with the sword before Barak. Sisera left his chariot and fled on foot.** ¹⁶ **Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth of the Nations, and the whole army of Sisera fell by the sword; not a single man was left.**

The details of the battle reveal the victory as being won by the Lord. He determined the battle site. Notice who **threw Sisera, all his charioteers, and all his army into confusion**. It was **the LORD**. The human instruments were Barak and the Israelites, but it was the Lord

who gave the victory.

Why would Sisera abandon his chariot and flee on foot? Because the Lord sent rain to flood the wadi, rendering the chariots useless in deep mud. The river Kishon is mentioned twice in chapter 4 (vv. 7,13). In Judges 5:4 we are told “the clouds poured water,” and in Judges 5:21, “the river Kishon swept them away.” This incident reminds us of Pharaoh’s chariots at the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex. 14:25). Sisera’s chariots of iron were powerful weapons under ideal conditions, but they were helpless when trapped in a sea of mud.

Barak witnessed the presence and the power of the Lord. With Sisera and his army in full retreat, Barak pursued them *as far as Harosheth* [huh ROH sheth] **of the Nations**. At Harosheth, Barak defeated Sisera’s whole army so thoroughly that not a single soldier survived.

Sisera alone escaped the battlefield. He made his way to the tent of Jael (the wife of Heber the Kenite, an ally of Sisera). Jael pretended to be a friend, invited Sisera into the tent, and gave him some milk to drink. When Sisera fell asleep, Jael used a hammer to drive a tent peg into his head (4:17-24).

How would you describe God’s role in this battle? How do you differentiate between fighting for a cause and fighting alongside God?

BIBLE SKILL: *Compare similar passages to gain a clearer understanding.*

Read these passages in your Bible: Exodus 14:1-31; Judges 7:1-25; 2 Kings 18:13–19:37. Noting the similarities of the above passages, read Revelation 19:17-21 and 20:1-15. What central themes do you see present in each passage, if any? What do these passages teach about God’s victory?



IN MY CONTEXT

- Godly leaders are expected to follow God’s commands and directives.
- Despite our doubts, God will remain true to His promises.
- Believers can have confidence in knowing that God’s purposes will be completed.

How can you encourage leaders to follow God’s commands? What actions can you take to encourage them in a Christ-honoring way?

Discuss ways the Bible study group can provide evidence of being faithful and willing servants to Jesus. What can the group do to foster faithfulness and willingness?

Evaluate your level of willingness to serve on a scale of one to ten with one being not willing and ten being actively serving now. What evidence can you point to in support of your evaluation? What needs to change for you to increase your level of willingness?

MEMORY VERSE

Listen, kings! Pay attention, princes! I will sing to the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel. —Judges 5:3