

He is Faithful

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 Kedesh. **10** Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; 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.

Exploration

Is it difficult for you to take people at their word? Do you tend to be more naturally trusting of other people, or more naturally suspicious? The degree to which we are willing to trust other people depends upon their character and the degree to which they have shown themselves trustworthy in the past. If someone fails to follow through with their commitments, we will lose trust and potentially even give up on ever trusting them again. As you work through Judges 4 with students, remind them of God's perfect track record of faithfulness. We can trust that He will do what He says because He always has. Guide students to contrast this with our imperfect, broken, and inconsistent track record of keeping promises. If you and your students are honest, you will admit that your record pales in comparison. Thankfully, we serve a God who is faithful to us despite our unfaithfulness and a God who will deliver those who humbly cry out to Him.

CONTEXT (JUDG. 3:7–5:31)

Judges 3:7-11 records the victory of Othniel, 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). 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, 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 ox goads from small trees or tree limbs, approximately six feet in length, peeled of bark for preservation. Honing one end to a dull point, as the name indicates, farmers used the tool to goad a stubborn ox.

Next in the line of leadership was Deborah. In Deborah's day, Israel suffered under the oppression of Jabin of Hazor, and his military commander, Sisera. 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.

Conversation

Welcome students back and discuss the following two quick response questions. Ask several students to share their answers.

› **Share about a time when you experienced déjà vu, when it seemed like you had the exact same experience twice.**

› **What happened? How did it make you feel?**

Déjà vu refers to the illusion of having previously experienced something that is actually being experienced for the first time. “Dos a Cero” (Spanish for 2-0) a popular slogan among United States soccer fans is a prime example. It arose as the United States Men’s National Team (USMNT) defeated Mexico by a score of 2-0 in four straight World Cup Qualifying matches played in Columbus, Ohio. In fact, since 2000, the USMNT has beaten their neighboring rival eight times by a score of 2-0. While we never actually experience the exact same thing twice, it can be surprising, unsettling even when it feels like we did.

Given their recent history as a nation, Israel’s predicament in Judges 4 should have felt like déjà vu. It wasn’t long ago that they were slaves in Egypt, unable to stand up to Pharaoh’s massive army of chariots. Now Israel finds themselves living in the land that God had promised them and yet, once again they are slaves, this time to the Canaanites. Not only that, but this was not the first time that Israel had turned their backs on God, found themselves oppressed by foreign nations, and cried out to God for help. This same story is told again and again in the Book of Judges and throughout the Old Testament. Given that this happened repeatedly, we might expect God to lose patience with the Israelites, to finally say enough is enough and give up on them. Thankfully, however, we do not serve a God who gives up on us when we are unfaithful to Him. In this session we will see that our God is faithful to deliver those who humbly cry out to Him.

JUDGES 4:4-7

› **Look at verses 1-4. What was Israel’s current situation? How did they end up there?**

› **Who is ultimately responsible for the Israelites’ predicament? Why is that important to note?**

After Ehud, who had delivered Israel from the oppression of the Moabites, died, the Israelites found themselves in a familiar predicament. Yet again, we see that they did what was evil in God’s sight and yet again, God raised up a pagan kingdom to punish them. Much like they were less than two generations ago, the Israelites once again found themselves living in slavery.

Leader Prep

JUDGES 4:4-7

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, 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 22:1-4), Nodiah (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 (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, who was Israel's military leader.

Deborah summoned Barak and reminded him that the Lord had commanded him to deploy the troops on Mount Tabor. The word summoned infers 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. 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.



Deborah revealed (v. 7) that the site of the battle would be near the Kishon River. During the summer months, this river would dry out to a mere trickle, but in the during the spring, the rains would cause it to swell and flood, rendering chariots far less mobile, illustrating God's hand at work behind the scenes.

Conversation

While the Israelites were to blame for their unfortunate circumstances due to their determination to sin against God, it is God who was ultimately in control. Verse 2 informs us that He “sold” the Israelites into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan. As we discussed last week, God did not do this out of spite, but out of faithfulness to His own Word. God had promised to raise up foreign nations to oppress His people should they rebel against Him by worshiping idols (Judg. 2:2-3)—His intention was ultimately redemptive—He intended to draw them back to Himself.

› Why might Barak have been hesitant to go into battle without Deborah? What does this tell us about him?

› What do we learn about Deborah and her leadership roles from these verses?

The text describes Deborah as a woman, a wife, a prophet, and a judge in Israel. As a prophet, she was God’s spokesperson to deliver His messages to the Israelites. But Deborah had the courage to serve God in a way unlike anyone else among her people. Because the hand of God was on her life, Deborah could render justice in matters that came before her. Deborah was also a spiritual leader. She served as God’s spiritual spokesperson to Barak, who was Israel’s military leader.

› Why did the Israelites cry out to the Lord for help?

› What did Deborah command Barak to do? What did Deborah remind Barak about? How might this reminder have been critical to the task?

The task at hand was not small. Jabin possessed 900 chariots of iron (the equivalent of a modern-day tank) and had oppressed Israel cruelly for 20 years (v. 3). Most commanders would be more than a little reticent to take on an army that possessed such a vast arsenal. It’s not surprising then that the Israelites cry out to the Lord for help, what is telling, however, is the fact Israel essentially has to hit rock bottom before they seek the Lord.

Deborah reminded her commander, Barak, that God had commanded Him to battle Jabin’s army by the river Kishon, whose banks during the rainy season would have rendered Jabin’s chariots useless. Deborah further reminded Barak that God had promised to give Jabin’s army into his hand. God has a perfect record when it comes to keeping His promises. This Word from God should have empowered Barak to lead the Israelites with confidence.

Conversation

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. The development of the horse-drawn chariot permitted large empires, such as the Hittites and Assyrians, to conquer many nations. 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.

JUDGES 4:8-16

› **What did Barak ask of Deborah (v. 8)? What difference did Deborah's presence make for Barak and the army (vv. 10, 14)?**

› **Despite Barak's fears, God used him and Deborah to utterly defeat Sisera and Jabin's 900 chariots. What does this tell us about God? How does this encourage or challenge you?**

Deborah knew that God had promised the Israelites victory over the Canaanites. Barak, however, needed encouragement to take on his leadership role in the process, and Deborah didn't hesitate in giving it by stating that she would indeed go with him (see 4:9). Deborah focused on what God commanded Barak to do, in fact as the armies gathered at the Kishon River, she boldly called Barak to action by reminding him of the Lord's promise. Faith in God's Word empowers us to do things that we would have never thought ourselves capable of doing. The same is true for students, whatever seemingly insurmountable odds stand in the way of them seeking Christ and living on mission, God is faithful to overcome. He has promised to use us to advance His kingdom and to be with us as we seek to do so. Like Barak, we have nothing to fear because God will be faithful to His every promise.

➤➤ **ITEM 9 (LEADER PACK)** Display the **Judges of Israel** pack item. This pack item will give more context and allow students to see all of the judges listed in a way that may help visual learners to better understand.

GO DEEPER OPTION: Read Exodus 17:8-16. In this story, God uses the presence of Moses to strengthen and empower His people to a great military victory. In both instances, it was not the person (Moses or Deborah) who empowered God's people but the Lord who raises up leaders to guide His people in the mission He has given them.

Leader Prep

JUDGES 4:12-14

Scouts reported to Sisera, Jabin's military leader, and informed him that Barak had gone up to Mount Tabor. Earlier, the Lord 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 (see Josh. 19:22). The Israelites, early in their history, probably worshiped there (see Deut. 33:18-19). Although unclear, Christian tradition identifies Mount Tabor as the place for the transfiguration of Jesus.

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.

JUDGES 4:15-16

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.

Barak witnessed the presence and the power of the Lord. With Sisera and army in full retreat, Barak pursued them as far as Harosheth 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 have him some milk to drink. When Sisera fell asleep, Jael used a hammer to drive a tent peg into his head (4:17-24). Sisera commanded his 900 iron chariots and supporting army to move toward the Wadi Kishon and meet Deborah and Barak's forces.



The River Kishon is mentioned twice in chapter 4 (vv. 7,13). In Judges 5:4 we are told that “the clouds poured water,” and in Judges 5:21 that “the river of 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.

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Application

CENTRAL TRUTH

Our God is faithful to deliver those who humbly cry out to Him.

As you close out your time with your group, help students to see how we often have selective vision when it comes to the past. Due to our sin nature, we have a tendency to take stock of all the times things didn't turn out as we had hoped and to neglect the many ways God has provided for us, taken care of us, and guided us. Furthermore, from today's study, we have seen that often when things are not going our way, God's hand is at work, correcting us and drawing us back to Himself. Challenge students to trust that God is at work in their lives, that He is writing a better story than they could write for themselves, a story of rescue and redemption.

➤➤ **ITEM 9** (LEADER PACK) Reference the **Promise of Land** pack item and guide students to take a closer look after you meet. Give them the opportunity to discuss God's promise of land throughout the Bible.

NOW WHAT?

- **How has God shown Himself faithful to you and your family in the past? How might you deepen your awareness of His faithfulness?**
- **Journal a list of promises in Scripture that God kept. Why is it crucial to remember that God did not keep these promises because of our faithfulness, but because of His own?**
- **What are some ways in your own life that courage is needed to take a stand for God?**
- **Read Romans 12:1. How did Deborah model this passage? What can we learn from her example?**

PERSONAL CHALLENGE

Finish your group time with these thoughts and encourage students to memorize the verse listed for this session. Memorizing God's Word allows it to dwell in us and allows Him to speak through His Word in our times of need. Also encourage your group to take advantage of the Keep on Digging section in their Personal Study Guides and to take the truths of this section and apply them to their lives.

› **Dwell:** Schedule a time this week to take a spiritual inventory of your life and how God has guided and directed you. It is important to remember that as a human being with a sin nature, you have a limited perspective on what God is doing in your life, but nonetheless, it is important that we acknowledge God's hand in our everyday lives. In an effort to do so, journal your answers to the following questions.

- › What would my life be like today if I had never heard the good news about Jesus?
- › When has God used other people to keep me from making a bad decision?
- › When have you been really frustrated by your circumstances in life? How do you see God's hand in this? How might He have been working in that situation to tell a better story than you could write for yourself?

› **Memorize:** Judges 5:3

› **Pray:** Thank God for His promises to provide for us, protect us, and redeem us. Ask Him to help you trust that He is writing a better story for you than you could write for yourself. Pray that you would trust that this is the case even when you face frustrating trials and difficult situations. Look to Him to humble you to see His hand at work, drawing you to Himself in all that you do and in everything that you face.

KEEP ON DIGGING

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 and journal your findings on what this passage tells you about God's work in your life and His will for your life.



For an expository verse-by-verse sermon outline/discussion guide that complements this session with a study in Galatians, see lifeway.com/ETBWIN17JJR. For **free** training, go to MinistryGrid.com/web/ExploreTheBible.