

Partnership

GODLY PARTNERSHIP BRINGS VICTORY

Focal Verses • JUDGES 4:1–10

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: **ANALYZE** the changing leadership dynamics during the time of Deborah; **EMPATHIZE** with Barak’s sense of inadequacy and Deborah’s sense of confidence; and **BE OPEN** to giving and receiving godly counsel.

In Focus

Placing his dinner on the dinner table, Brandon mechanically mumbled his grace while filling his mouth and checking his email. He was feeling pretty beat up after his first week of teaching. The kids had given him a run for his money as they challenged his authority and made things hard for the other students. Brandon was beginning to wonder whether he had made the right decision to teach kids in the inner city. Was this his idea or God’s? After a day like this, he was beginning to think it was his idea. Maybe he had bitten off more than he could chew. As he looked through his email, he noticed a message from his great uncle, with the subject line “Stand and see.”

Curious, he opened the email and read: “You are teaching today’s youth like my brother – your granddad. I couldn’t be more proud of you if I tried. But teaching has changed, and I’m guessing the Bronx is very different from the South. I’m sure the last few days in your classroom have taught you this much (ha ha). Know that I’m praying for you, nephew. I’m guessing right now, you might have some questions and concerns. I imagine you’re wondering if you are in God’s will. Right?”

Well, I have a word from the Lord— ‘Stand still, and see.’ That’s all, ‘Stand and see.’”

God calls ordinary people to do extraordinary things so that He might receive the glory. When has God challenged you to do something out of your comfort zone? Who served as a helpful partner during that time?



Keep in Mind

“And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh” (Judges 4:9, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Judges 4:1** And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead.

2 And the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor; the captain of whose host was Sisera, which dwelt in Harosheth of the Gentiles.

3 And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD: for he had nine hundred chariots of iron; and twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel.

4 And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time.

5 And she dwelt under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in mount Ephraim: and the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

6 And she sent and called Barak the son of Abinoam out of Kedeshnaphtali, and said unto him, Hath not the LORD God of Israel

commanded, saying, Go and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun?

7 And I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand.

8 And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go.

9 And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh.

10 And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and he went up with ten thousand men at his feet: and Deborah went up with him.

The People, Places, and Times

Deborah. Deborah, whose name means “honeybee,” was a leader, wife, prophetess, and poet. Her responsibilities included settling disputes and offering advice and guidance to leaders like Barak. She was a woman of influence and power, whose decision making was a marked contrast to that of Jephthah and Samson, who judged Israel after her. Jephthah made a vow in an attempt to manipulate God (Judges 11:29–40); Samson struggled with lust and devoted himself to a prostitute (Judges 16:1). As a woman, Deborah demonstrated fidelity to her husband and to those whom she led. Perhaps she heard disputes under her palm tree because it was inappropriate for a man to visit a woman in her house.

Barak. Barak, whose name means “lightning,” initially hesitated to accept his

call to fight against Sisera. He later led ten thousand warriors from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun into battle against the Canaanites. However, he accepted Deborah's call to battle only after she agreed to accompany him. Regardless, he is listed in Hebrews 11:32 as a hero of faith.

Sisera. Sisera was the general of the Canaanite king Jabin's soldiers. He was possibly a Hurrian, a people known as expert chariot-fighters in the Late Bronze Age. Well prepared and equipped, he relied on his nine hundred chariots of iron and a host of soldiers.

Background

Israel lived comfortably in peace after Ehud's triumph over Moab (Judges 3:12–30). Then they were forced into survival mode by Canaanite troops. Cities previously destroyed

by Joshua had been rebuilt as the Canaanites grew stronger. People previously conquered by the Israelites now ruled and demanded tribute.

Deborah stood to speak for God during challenging times. Without a similar model or mentor, she assumed a role generally filled by men, and rose up to initiate a fight, motivate an army, and encourage a leader. Barak did not allow Deborah's gender to cloud his response. He answered the call and partnered with Deborah to lead the army.

At-A-Glance

1. Sisera's Oppression (Judges 4:1-3)
2. Deborah's Inspiration (vv. 4-7)
3. Barak's Hesitation (vv. 8-10)

In Depth

1. Sisera's Oppression (Judges 4:1-3)

Once again, after a brief time of peace and safety, the Israelites had gone back to worshiping the gods of their neighbors. This would result in their being oppressed by those same people. God would not tolerate their idolatry and unfaithfulness. They were His people, and He expected them to be loyal to Him.

After Ehud died, the Israelites fell into the hands of Jabin, the king of Canaan. He oppressed the Israelites through his general Sisera, who had nine hundred iron chariots at his command. This definitely placed him at an advantage as the Israelites had no chariots or iron weapons. To go against Sisera would be suicide.

2. Deborah's Inspiration (vv. 4-7)

The Lord would not break His covenant with His people. He raises up an unlikely leader in Deborah. Considering the patriarchal culture of the time, Deborah's leadership as a woman was unusual. She was a prophetess and a judge, speaking God's Word and enforcing His laws

and wisdom. Deborah was a formidable leader during this time of oppression and chaos.

Deborah received inspiration from God, and called out Barak to lead Israel against Sisera. Not only did she challenge him to fight for Israel's freedom, she also committed to join him in battle, leading Sisera right into Barak's hands.

3. Barak's Hesitation (vv. 8-10)

Barak is not as confident as Deborah. His response shows that he doesn't believe the Lord has really chosen him to lead. He is hesitant to join Deborah in her plan against Sisera. What he doesn't realize is that the plan is not just Deborah's, but God's. Barak lets Deborah know that he will go only if she does. His faith is not in God, but Deborah's leadership. He doesn't realize that God is the deciding factor; his advantage over Sisera is not Deborah, but that God will be with him. As a result, Deborah informs him that because of his hesitation and fear, the honor of victory will go to a woman, not to him. His personal lack of faith resulted in being dishonored by God and not receiving personal victory.

Search the Scriptures

1. How did having iron chariots help Sisera and his army dominate the Israelites in warfare (Judges 4:3)?
2. What feeling motivated the response Barak gave to Deborah after she challenged him to lead Israel into battle (v. 8)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What things in our lives can make us feel inadequate to respond to God's call?
2. What are the differences between confidence in God and self-reliance?

Liberating Lesson

Like the Israelites, Christians engaged in spiritual warfare can sometimes follow a cycle of apostasy, oppression, repentance, and

deliverance. The cycle occurs when Christians value their own strength and capabilities over dependence on God. Doubt and over-reliance on something other than God will eventually cause Christians to fall, becoming ensnared in bondage.

Times for courage can be instances where we have to deliver bad news, such as: you did not get the job, you are fired, I'm taking away your cell phone for a week. Focusing on ourselves or the situation rather than God's promises can lead to anxiety, doubt, and even panic. Instead, choose to believe God's message, reach out for fellowship, and accept good advice when it is offered.

This lesson is also an important example of how God uses the leadership and skills of women. In most societies, women are marginalized and often abused. The Word of God shows that women are equally made in the image of God as men and are just as important to God's work in the world.

Application for Activation

Christian leadership begins with a call—a sense that God has a specific role or task for each Christian to accomplish (Romans 12). God prepared Barak for his battle with Sisera and raised him up to be a general. Similarly, He prepares each believer to accomplish specific tasks. What

role has God prepared you for? The call originates with God, and confidence to accomplish the task begins in us. We grow in confidence by making time to meditate on the Bible's promises, even just by repeating them over and over to ourselves.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Travailleth. tra-VALE-eth.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 36

Leviticus 14–15

Psalm 19:1–6

DAY 37

Leviticus 16–18

Psalm 19:7–14

DAY 38

Leviticus 19–21

Psalm 20:1–5

DAY 39

Leviticus 22–23

Psalm 20:6–9

DAY 40

Leviticus 24–25

Psalm 21:1–7

DAY 41

Leviticus 26–27

Psalm 21:8–13

DAY 42

Numbers 1–4

Psalm 22:1–5

Notes
