Lesson 4: Deborah and Barak

Teaching Outline — The LORD Fights for His People
Passage: Judges 4-5 (KJV) | **Suggested teaching time:** 45 minutes
Key verse: “So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might.” (Judges 5:31a)

Lesson objective

- Class will:
  - Identify the LORD as Israel’s Deliverer
  - Respond to His word with courageous obedience
  - Give Him rather than human servants the glory for victory

---

Opening and introduction (0-4 minutes)

Who we meet today

- A prophetess
- A reluctant military commander
- A terrifying enemy commander
- An unexpected woman in a tent
- Not finally the story of any of them — the story of the LORD who:
  - Heard His people
  - Spoke His word
  - Went before them
  - Defeated an enemy they could not defeat by their own strength

Read these chapters honestly

- Israel again did evil; the oppression was God’s righteous chastening
- The people cried; the LORD raised deliverance
- The cycle neither excuses Israel’s sin nor makes God unfaithful
  - Displays the seriousness of idolatry

- Displays the mercy of the covenant-keeping God

Three truths to keep before us

1. [BLANK: the LORD] fights for His people
2. His servants are called to serve with [BLANK: courage]
3. All [BLANK: glory] belongs to the LORD

Careful application

- The specific national deliverance belongs to Israel in its Old Testament setting
- Military details aren't a direct promise of earthly conquest for the church
- The God revealed here hasn't changed
  - Believers are called to trust, obey, praise, and stand in the strength He supplies

---

Background (4-9 minutes)

Oppression under Jabin and Sisera (4:1-3)

- "And the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, when Ehud was dead."
- The LORD "sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, that reigned in Hazor"
- Sisera, captain of Jabin's host
  - Nine hundred chariots of iron
  - "twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel"
- Iron chariots: overwhelming military power on suitable ground
- Israel's distress was real, prolonged, and beyond ordinary remedy

Deborah

- "a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth"; she judged Israel
- Sat under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel
- Israel came to her for judgment
- A woman God appointed to speak His word and exercise judgment in Israel
  - Don't diminish her service
  - Don't use her exceptional office to settle every later question of church order

- Let the passage say what it says: the LORD raised Deborah; Israel was helped through her faithful service

God's command to Barak

- Deborah sent for Barak of Kedesh-naphtali
- Not a private hunch
  - "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?"
- God's promise
  - "I will draw unto thee to the river Kishon Sisera… and I will deliver him into thine hand."
- The issue wasn't whether Barak could devise a winning strategy
  - Would he believe and obey the word God had given?

The location matters

- Hazor: significant Canaanite center in the north
- Its king: head of a coalition with dangerous military reach
- Barak: from Naphtali in the north, near the enemy's pressure
- Mount Tabor rose above the plain
- The Kishon ran where Sisera's chariots would be most useful
- Not an easy contest — the army with feared equipment controlled the ground where it excelled

Evil (v. 1) and cry (v. 3) together

- Neither shallow optimism about human nature nor a cold picture of God
- The people sinned and were answerable; chastening was deserved
- The LORD did not abandon them to Canaan forever
- Covenant mercy
  - Consistent with His holy character and His promises
  - Not approval of idolatry — gracious intervention to turn them from ruin

The word at the center

- Israel came to Deborah for judgment; Barak received a command in the LORD's name
- A frightened nation may want a dramatic personality, clever plan, or reassuring prediction
- God first gives a word to be heard

- Faith doesn't manufacture courage from temperament
  - Biblical faith rests on what God has said
  - The command identifies the duty
  - The promise supplies the ground for obedience

Exposition: The LORD goes before His servants (9-19 minutes)

Barak's condition

- "If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go."
- Deborah agreed, with a sober word
  - "the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman."
- Barak did go — gathered Zebulun and Naphtali, went up with ten thousand
- Hesitation shouldn't erase his obedience (Heb 11:32)
- Judges lets us feel the cost: God gives victory, but the honor isn't Barak's

A truthful, mixed portrait

- His words reveal weakness — obedience attached to her accompanying him
  - Deborah doesn't call it ideal; loss of honor is plainly announced
- Still, he gathers the men and enters battle
- Hebrews counts him among those who "through faith subdued kingdoms" (Heb 11:33)
- The Bible doesn't excuse a servant's fear or deny grace in an imperfect servant
- Sober encouragement
  - Not "Can I present myself as naturally fearless?"
  - "Having received God's clear command, will I move forward in dependence on Him?"

Deborah's presence did not replace the LORD's

- A visible reminder that command and promise came from God
- God may use a mature person to steady us, explain Scripture, or encourage a first act of obedience
  - A teacher, parent, pastor, or friend

- No human companion is the source of our courage
  - If confidence rests finally in a person, disappointment or absence will rule us
- The enduring foundation: the LORD who has spoken and goes before His servants

The center of the chapter (v. 14)

- Sisera hears, gathers all his chariots and people to the Kishon
- “Up; for this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the LORD gone out before thee?”
- The LORD didn’t merely send Barak into danger — He went before him

God’s control and Sisera’s choice

- Command to go “toward mount Tabor” + promise to draw Sisera to the Kishon
  - The enemy’s approach wasn’t outside God’s control
- Sisera gathered freely, with hostile intent; the LORD wasn’t reacting helplessly
- God’s sovereignty doesn’t make Sisera innocent or remove Barak’s duty
- Powerful opposition can’t step outside the boundaries of God’s purpose

When opposition looks organized and durable

- Sisera: years of oppression, equipment, a coalition
- Israel: a command, a promise, and a God it had repeatedly grieved
- The LORD isn’t impressed by resources that intimidate us
- Count His promise weightier than the visible size of the problem
  - Doesn’t authorize reckless decisions detached from Scripture
  - Frees us from treating difficulty as proof obedience is impossible

The volunteers matter

- God could have defeated Sisera without them; He chose to involve Israel
- Divine sovereignty doesn’t erase meaningful human service
  - Barak must gather; tribes must answer; the army must descend
- Refuse both pride and passivity
  - Can’t claim credit for God’s work
  - Can’t use sovereignty to neglect the work He gives
- Prayer, preparation, witness, generosity, endurance — real acts of obedience offered in reliance on the Lord

“Up” — a certainty, not vague encouragement

- Anchored: “this is the day in which the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand”
- Battle still had to be entered; swords used; danger real
- God’s promise made obedience reasonable
- Christian confidence
  - Doesn’t mean circumstances become painless or predictable
  - God’s revealed will is more certain than our changing feelings
  - We don’t know every outcome, but the Lord is faithful; no duty He commands is wasted

The victory (v. 15)

- “And the LORD discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host, with the edge of the sword before Barak.”
- Prose clearly assigns the victory to the LORD
- Poetry: “They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. The river of Kishon swept them away.” (5:20-21)
- Some infer rain and mud
  - The song portrays creation under God’s command
  - No warrant to make a weather report the main point
- Safe and sufficient: the text plainly declares that [BLANK: God] discomfited Sisera
  - God is never outmatched by the forces that frighten His people

Jael and Sisera’s end

- Sisera fled on foot to the tent of Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite
- Expected safety — peace between Jabin and the house of Heber
- She gave him milk, covered him; after he slept, took a nail of the tent and a hammer and killed him
- Violent narrative because a violent period
  - A decisive historical judgment on Israel’s oppressor
- Deborah’s word was fulfilled exactly
- Emphasis: not clever human revenge, but fulfilled divine word and divine victory

Jael requires particular care

- Blessed in a historical conflict and fulfilled prophecy
- Doesn’t establish a private right to violence against perceived enemies
- No pattern for taking civil judgment into our own hands

- The church follows Christ's commands: love, witness, patience, submission to lawful authority
- Receive the historical meaning; don't extract a sensational method
- Sisera, who inspired such fear, couldn't escape God's announced judgment

The repeated subject (v. 23)

- "So God subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel."
- The LORD went out; the LORD discomfited; God subdued
- Deborah, Barak, the volunteers, and Jael — real servants, real responsibility
- None may take the crown from the Deliverer
- [BLANK: victory] belongs to God, not human strength

Exposition: A song that gives God His due (19-29 minutes)

Praise first (5:1-3)

- "Then sang Deborah and Barak… Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves."
- Doesn't congratulate human brilliance first
- Calls kings and princes to hear: "I, even I, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel."
- Praise isn't an optional emotional add-on — it's the truthful response to deliverance

Why a song?

- Not a decorative appendix to ch. 4
- Poetry lets Israel interpret the event in worship
- "LORD, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom."
  - Recalls His mighty acts for Israel in earlier days
  - The God who met Israel at Sinai hadn't become distant or weak
  - Still shakes what seems stable; still acts for His covenant people
- Songs help a people remember theology, not merely feelings
- A singing congregation rehearses God's character and works for the next fearful day

Israel’s desperate condition and root issue

- “The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel.”
- “They chose new gods; then was war in the gates.”
- External trouble tied to internal unfaithfulness
- The deepest crisis wasn’t Sisera’s chariots but divided worship
- Israel’s root problem was [BLANK: idolatry] — it always makes God’s people vulnerable

“They chose new gods” — searching interpretation

- Israel might have named chariots, closed roads, insecurity, a stronger neighbor — all real
- The song reaches below the visible crisis to the worship crisis
- Application begins with hearts, not circumstances
- An idol: anything we trust, obey, or prize in a place that belongs to God
  - Can wear a religious appearance or respectable name
  - Security in savings
  - Worth in praise
  - Peace in control
  - Identity in a cause
- A divided heart remains spiritually dangerous

Willing and hesitant tribes

- Honored: leaders from Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir, Zebulun, Issachar, Naphtali
- Exposed:
  - Reuben — “great thoughts of heart,” remained among the sheepfolds
  - Dan — remained in ships
  - Asher — continued on the seashore
- Not that every Christian must accept every proposed activity
- God sees whether we eagerly answer His clear call or protect ease, reputation, and convenience

Participation and refusal

- Zebulun and Naphtali “jeoparded their lives unto the death in the high places of the field”
- Reuben: “great thoughts of heart,” “great searchings of heart” — yet stays with the sheepfolds
- Reflection can become a substitute for obedience
  - We can discuss a need, appreciate a ministry, feel strongly — and never take the costly step

- Not a license to judge every believer's calling from a distance
- A summons to examine whether our excuses preserve comfort at the expense of known duty

Voluntary, not coerced

- "Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves."
- God isn't honored by outward activity seeking human approval
- He creates willing servants by grace
- In the church
  - Don't manipulate with guilt to produce visible participation
  - Teach the Word, pray for willing hearts
  - Invite service because Christ first served them
- Public or hidden; proper motive: love for the Lord

Jael celebrated; Sisera's mother at the window

- "Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be."
- Sisera's mother waits, certain her son is merely delayed dividing spoil
- Severe irony: human confidence that ignores God is empty confidence
- A final warning about presumption
  - Her companions' explanation flatters Sisera, assumes Israel's defeat
  - They left the LORD out of their calculation
  - Many human plans look secure until God overturns them
  - Doesn't teach rejoicing in personal cruelty
  - Teaches: fear the Lord, refuse arrogance, rest in His righteous judgment

The song closes with prayer (5:31)

- Not with Jael, Deborah, or Barak
- "So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might."
- The proper desire: not personal revenge, but God's righteousness and the flourishing strength of those who love Him
- "the land had rest forty years"

Application (29-36 minutes)

1. **Name the true battle**
   - Israel's trouble began with turning from the LORD
   - We want relief from consequences while protecting the idol that produced them
     - Approval, money, control, pleasure, anger, self-rule
   - Repentance doesn't merely ask God to stop the pain; it turns from sin to Him
   - True [BLANK: repentance] turns from sin to God — never cosmetic
2. **Obey what God has plainly said**
   - Barak had a direct command through Deborah
   - We ordinarily aren't given new revelation about every decision
   - Don't demand a Deborah-like word before doing what Scripture commands
     - Pray, speak truth, forgive, serve, gather with the saints
     - Flee sexual sin, make disciples, bear witness to Christ
   - Courage isn't absence of trembling; it's obedience while trembling
3. **Serve humbly with others**
   - God used Deborah, Barak, Jael, and willing tribes
   - No servant is unnecessary; no servant is ultimate
   - The church needs people who answer a clear biblical need without demanding the spotlight
   - God uses [BLANK: willing] servants who answer His call — a gift from God
4. **Give the LORD the credit**
   - Family restored, sinner converted, ministry fruitful, temptation resisted — don't parade ourselves
   - "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory" (Ps 115:1)
   - Thank faithful people without confusing instruments with the One who works through them
   - We obey **to** honor the God who saved us; we don't obey **for** acceptance before Him
     - Courageous service is the fruit of grace, never the price of it
     - Keeps us from fearful performance and careless presumption
5. **Let answered prayer become worship**
   - Easy to pray urgently, then return to ordinary life as if the rescue were self-explanatory
   - Judges 5 slows Israel down to name what God did
   - Make thanksgiving specific — not only the outcome, but:
     - His patience
     - His Word
     - The people He used

        - Protection from error
        - Strength supplied in weakness
    - Specific praise trains the heart away from entitlement

> **Teacher note — church office questions:** If discussion turns to whether Deborah's leadership settles modern questions about church offices, return to the passage's stated purpose.
>
> - Deborah was God's appointed prophetess and judge in Israel; her faithful service should be honored
> - The chapter isn't an exhaustive treatment of church order
> - Immediate lesson: the LORD speaks, leads, and saves through servants He chooses, and every servant must give Him the glory

---

Christ and the gospel (36-41 minutes)

Temporary deliverers, a final Deliverer

- Deborah and Barak couldn't remove Israel's sinful heart; after forty years the cycle returns
- Jesus Christ: the greater and final Deliverer
    - Didn't merely defeat an army outside His people
    - Bore sin's judgment at the cross
    - Rose from the dead
    - Triumphed over the powers that enslave
- "having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Col 2:15)

Good news for the weak

- The gospel doesn't tell weak people to make themselves brave enough for God
- Christ died for sinners and rose again
    - "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8)
- Received through repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ
- Not earned by heroic service
- Those in Christ are called to stand — in His victory, not their own

Israel is Israel; the church is the church

- We don’t claim the land, civil arrangements, or national warfare as promises to the church
- The moral and theological witness is for us
  - The holy God judges sin
  - Hears His people
  - Accomplishes His purpose
  - Deserves all praise
- The lasting Deliverer to whom this book points is [BLANK: Christ]

Christ’s victory changes courage

- We don’t fight to establish acceptance — the cross secured reconciliation for all who believe
- We don’t wield the weapons of Israel’s national wars
  - Our warfare is spiritual: truth, prayer, holiness, love, the gospel
  - “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood.” (Eph 6:12)
- So we can be:
  - Firm without becoming hostile
  - Brave without becoming proud
  - Faithful without confusing earthly success with the kingdom of God

Deeper, permanent rest

- Rest after Jabin lasted forty years, then ended
- The risen Christ gives a deeper and permanent salvation
- He will finally judge all evil and preserve all who belong to Him
- The church sings not because every conflict has ended, but because the decisive Deliverer has come
- His resurrection: weakness and suffering don’t have the final word

---

Discussion and closing (41-45 minutes)

Discussion questions

1. What phrases in Judges 4 explicitly place victory in the LORD’s hands?
2. How can Barak be both a man remembered for faith and an example of hesitant obedience?

3. What does Judges 5 teach about worship after God answers prayer?
4. Where might comfort or fear keep us from a clear act of obedience?

Close

- **Read Judges 5:31a together**
- Don’t leave merely admiring courageous people
- Leave trusting the LORD who goes before His people

> **Closing prayer:** “Holy Father, we confess that we often fear visible obstacles more than we trust Thy word. Forgive our divided hearts and our desire for human glory. Thank Thee for Thy faithful care of Thy people and for the perfect deliverance given in Thy Son. Make us willing, humble, and courageous in every clear duty. Help us praise Thee when Thou workest, for the victory belongs to Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”