

What Are You Waiting For?

Has not the Lord gone ahead of you?

This is a phrase that should put our actions and motives in check. It's a phrase that should make our fear take a back seat and our boldness hit the gas. It's a phrase that cries "**Why are we still talking about this?**" It's a phrase that demands execution. It's a phrase we heard from prophet and judge Deborah in the book of **Judges** Chapter 4 as she continued to lead Israel to victory, peace, and in following the lord.

Welcome to **Week 4 of What She Said**, a 5 week study of women in the Bible that helped shape history, and the memorable things they said. Deborah is an often overlooked leader in scripture. She's mentioned in two chapters of Judges, and because it's in the middle of a bunch of names, kings, and other Game of Thrones sounding backstory, it's easy for your eyes to glaze over reading those chapters. There's important things we can learn and take from her story, so let's dive in.

Judges 4:1-3 (NIV) **1** Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, now that Ehud was dead. **2** So the LORD sold them into the hands of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. Sisera, the commander of his army, was based in Harosheth Haggoyim. **3** Because he had nine hundred chariots fitted with iron and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the LORD for help.

Names to remember:

Jabin, King of Canaan, Israel's enemy and oppressor.

Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army who had a fleet of chariots and soldiers.

Judges 4:4 (NIV) Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time.

We're just gonna pause and acknowledge this. Deborah was leading Israel. Not Israel's women's group. Not Israel's children's ministry. She was leading the entire people and nation. She was also a prophet, meaning God spoke to her and she relayed his messages. She was also married, but the only thing we know about Lappidoth is that he was married to Deborah.

Judges 4:5 (NIV) She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided.

She was the person that held authority in disputes and people trusted her wisdom. She would guide people on when to act, when to refrain, and what was needed to bring peace. As we look at the rest of this story I want us to see **4 Stakes we need to nail down in our heart when it comes down to our service for God:**

Stake #1 - God Will Call Us To Action

Judges 4:6-7 (NIV) 6 She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, “The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: ‘Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. **7** I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.’”

Barak was a leader, a commander, and someone who could go toe to toe with Sisera and Canaan’s army. Barak was who God chose to fight this battle. God even promised to hand Sisera directly into Barak’s hands. Deborah’s only role in this was to deliver the message. She did her job. Barak was supposed to say “Yes,” and trust God to be God. But it didn’t go that way

Judges 4:8 (NIV) 8 Barak said to her, “If you go with me, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go.”

God had told Barak He was going to literally hand Him his enemy, but Barak said he would only go if Deborah went with him. **Essentially he was trusting in the messenger of God more than God himself.** This man had an army of 10,000 men and the promise of God, but felt like he needed more and in this case he thought he needed Deborah for it to be a success. This may sound like a silly thing, but it’s something that is normal and frequent. It’s easier to trust the preacher you see than the God who feels distant, which is why we’re so often let down. **No prophet, preacher, or messenger of God can substitute for the presence of God.** **Stake #1 - God Will Call Us To Action**

Stake #2 - There are consequences to our inaction

Judges 4:9-10 (NIV) 9 “Certainly I will go with you,” said Deborah. “But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.” So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. **10** There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men went up under his command. Deborah also went up with him.

God told Barak through Deborah that since you feel like you have to have this woman’s presence for victory, that He was going to give the overall victory to a woman. Let’s be real, Women have had to rise up where men fell short for generations. It doesn’t just apply to Gender, if you aren’t willing to trust God and step up when He gives you opportunity, then you have to understand someone else is going to get that opportunity. God doesn’t need you, but He will use you if you actually step up when He calls.

Judges 4:11(NIV) Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses’ brother-in-law, and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaananim near Kedesh.

This verse feels a bit out of place and talks about people we’ve not heard about before, but God is setting up what he’s going to do next, and this is a direct result of Barak’s hesitation and dependency on Deborah. Now, back to the battle.

Judges 4:12-13 (NIV) 12 When they told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, **13** Sisera summoned from Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River all his men and his nine hundred chariots fitted with iron.

Sisera got word that Barak and his army was on the way, so he got his army together, and said, "Let's do this."

Judges 4:14 (NIV) 14 Then Deborah said to Barak, "Go! This is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the LORD gone ahead of you?" So Barak went down Mount Tabor, with ten thousand men following him.

Barak saw this army amassed in front of him. Scripture doesn't say he was afraid or fearful, but we do see that he didn't move until Deborah encouraged Him to do so. Deborah didn't go into the battle, she didn't take a single swing, but she encouraged the man to actually move. Couple things we can take from this.

1. Our little bit of encouragement can be what pushes others to trust God - sometimes the faith that God gives you can be a catalyst to encourage someone else to step out in faith. (Give an example of where someone encouraged you by the faith that they had)

2. God is ready to move if we would only take action - oftentimes we don't realize that God is in the process of trying to build our faith and He will not move until we take that first step of faith demonstrating that we are willing to trust Him. Are you willing to take God at His word? Or have you been waiting for God to move first before you are willing to move? **Stake #1 - God Will Call Us To Action. Stake #2 - There are consequences to our inaction.** And that brings us to

Stake #3 - We can't give up when we are disciplined or face consequences for our actions

We never hear Barak whine or complain that God prophesied against him. We never hear Barak say "That's not fair, the victory should be mine!" We see him take his rebuke and continue moving forward. Some of us struggle with that. If things don't go our way, or we actually have to deal with a confrontation, we pout like defeated children crying under the slide on a playground. You have to own your mistakes but still be able to move forward.

Judges 4:15-16 (NIV) 15 At Barak's advance, the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot. **16** Barak pursued the chariots and army as far as Harosheth Haggoyim, and all Sisera's troops fell by the sword; not a man was left.

God did exactly what He said He would do. He laid waste to the entire army that oppressed His people. But because of Barak's hesitancy to trust solely in Him, Sisera ran away on foot, and

Barak was denied the personal victory in battle. We know that God's purposes aren't held back by the failures or faults of one person. God's plan is never ruined just because we fail to act but we can miss out on the blessing of allowing God to work through us when we do and it can lead to a more complicated situation than would have otherwise occurred.

Judges 4:17 (NIV) Sisera, meanwhile, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was an alliance between Jabin king of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite.

Remember that one family that broke off earlier in the scripture and set up camp, this is them. Heber the Kenite had an alliance with king Jabin. Kenites were metalsmiths and because of their valuable skill, they were considered non-partisan. This was a safe space. This was neutral ground. Their people had ties back to Moses and Jethro with the Canaanites. This was a place where Sisera could hide in safety.

Judges 4:18-20 (NIV) **18** Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Come, my lord, come right in. Don't be afraid." So he entered her tent, and she covered him with a blanket. **19** "I'm thirsty," he said. "Please give me some water." She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up. **20** "Stand in the doorway of the tent," he told her. "If someone comes by and asks you, 'Is anyone in there?' say 'No.'"

Barak is hunting this man down. All of Israel's warriors are searching for Him. And He's getting some milk and is gonna take a nap. He thinks he's in a safe place, but we need to be reminded, there's no safe place to hide from God. Folks today think that as long as I don't come to church on Sunday, I'm hidden. Nah fam. **You literally never know how close or far you are from someone whom God is working in.**

Judges 4:21 (NIV) But Jael, Heber's wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died.

Remember what Deborah said? Because of Barak's hesitancy and dependance on her, the victory would be in the hands of a woman. Jael definitely won. She gave the dude milk, a blanket, and then stealthily put a tent peg in his head. She may have done it out of fear of being found harboring an enemy of Israel. She may have done it because she was tired of the oppression of king Jabin. She may have done it out of love for God. She may have just been a bit of a sketchy violent person. Scripture doesn't tell us why. But some interesting things is that her story has been one of the most retold stories in the Bible throughout literature. It's been recounted in dozens of books like Canterbury Tales and many more. In 2016 Jael was one of the most common first name among Israelite women. That's a side track though, back to the story.

Judges 4:22-24 (NIV) **22** Just then Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. "Come," she said, "I will show you the man you're looking for." So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera with the tent peg through his temple—dead. **23** On that day God subdued

Jabin king of Canaan before the Israelites. **24** And the hand of the Israelites pressed harder and harder against Jabin king of Canaan until they destroyed him.

God did exactly what He said He would. He delivered Sisera's army to Israel in battle. And He handed the victory to a woman, who was literally just chilling in her tent. One man's hesitancy and disobedience didn't stop the plan, and Barak was even able to see first hand how God moved without him. That's the end of the battle, but the story continues into Judges chapter 5.

Stake #1 - God Will Call Us To Action

Stake #2 - There are consequences to our inaction. Stake #3 - We can't give up when we are disciplined or face consequences for our actions. And finally,

Stake #4 - We should celebrate the victories, even when they aren't ours

Judges 5:1 (NIV) On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song:

You heard and read that correctly. Standing outside the tent of Jael at their moment of victory, Deborah and Barak broke out in song. Full blown musical theater level. Where they both sing the praises of God, His faithfulness, and His deliverance. They even do a full retelling of Jael's heroism and actions to song. If Barak would have obeyed, that part of the song would have been about him, but he didn't have a problem celebrating what God did through Jael. It's 30 verses long, so we'll save that for you to read, but it's important to note that Deborah was there with Barak as it all was seen through, and not to condemn but that they could learn from the whole experience. Deborah wasn't just the messenger in this, she was going to have to continue to lead over these people. This is the last thing written about them at the end of chapter 5.

Judges 5:31 (NIV) Then the land had peace forty years.

Under Deborah's leadership, and the actions of God's people they entered into a lifetime of peace. They had been oppressed for 20 years, and would experience double that in peace. It wasn't the smoothest execution of a plan or prophecy that brought them there, but God proved that not only is He faithful, but that He expects us to respond with obedience when He calls.

Invitation:

What has God called you to do that you haven't done yet because you want the pastor or leader to go before you to do?

What is causing you to hesitate?

Who is your spiritual security blanket rather than you trusting God?

Are you in a place where you can celebrate the victories even though they are not yours? If not, why not?