The Wisdom of a Deliverer

**SESSION IN A SENTENCE:** God positions His people and provides them with gifts to bring Him glory.

**MAIN PASSAGES:** Judges 4:4-7,14-16; 5:1-5,9-11

In the fall of 2017, as deadly wildfires swept through California, Roland Hendel realized he and his family were in danger, so they packed to leave their home. As flames approached, he turned his attention to his eight goats and Great Pyrenees dog, Odin. Hendel didn’t have time to load the goats into a trailer, and Odin gave him a look that said, “I’m not moving.” So Hendel opened the gates allowing the goats and Odin to escape if needed. He then got into his car and fled with his family and other pets.

When Hendel returned the next day, he found that his entire property had been destroyed, including his home. Odin and the eight goats, however, were alive and well. Odin’s pads were burned, his fur singed, and he was exhausted. Hendel deduced that Odin had led the goats to a clearing surrounded by some rocks where they were able to avoid the flames.¹

When have you witnessed or heard of an unexpected rescuer?
God’s faithful people use their gifts in service to Him (Judg. 4:4-7).

4 Deborah, a prophetess and the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. 5 She would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to settle disputes. 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 ten thousand men from the Naphtalites and Zebulunites? Then I will lure Sisera commander of Jabin’s army, his chariots, and his infantry at the Wadi Kishon to fight against you, and I will hand him over to you.’”

As a prophetess, Deborah’s role was to speak the word of the Lord to His people. As a judge, she helped to resolve the quarrels of her people. Fulfilling both of these roles was challenging enough for men like Moses, but doing so as a woman in a patriarchal society was more challenging still. God guided Deborah to summon Barak to battle Sisera. Barak balked at going alone, so faithful Deborah went with him. She warned him, however, that he would receive no honor because of his fear; the Lord would sell Sisera into the hands of a woman (vv. 8-9).

What limits or conditions do we tend to put on our obedience to God? Why?

God’s Command Through Deborah

• Where? ________________

• Who? _______________ and an army of _______________ from Naphtali and Zebulun

• What would happen? ______ would give the ____________ over Sisera’s army

Voices from Church History

“The job has been given to me to do. Therefore it is a gift. Therefore it is a privilege. Therefore it is an offering I may make to God. Therefore it is to be done gladly, if it is done for Him. Therefore it is the route to sanctity.”

—Elisabeth Elliot (1926-2015)
Point 2: God’s faithful people courageously face impossible odds (Judg. 4:14-16).

14 Then Deborah said to Barak, “Go! 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 ten thousand men following him.

15 The LORD threw Sisera, all his charioteers, and all his army into a panic before Barak’s assault. 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.

When Sisera heard the Israelites had gathered on Mount Tabor, he rounded up his chariots and army and marched toward the outmatched Israelites to destroy them. And then Barak obeyed in his next step of faith to come down from the mountaintop to attack Sisera. God calls on His people to take each step of faith knowing He is with us, leading us, and empowering us. Being afraid is no excuse for disobedience. God doesn’t require fearlessness from us, only trusting obedience.

What are some situations that can cause paralyzing fear in believers?

What prompted Barak to charge into battle was not looking at the odds; they were stacked against him. The odds said to flee, or at least to hold firm on the high ground. The odds made it seem victory was impossible. But the problem with looking at the odds is that we often look at them the wrong way: The odds were never about Barak and the Israelites against Sisera and the Canaanites but about Sisera, his chariots, and his army against God Almighty. What looked impossible for Barak was actually impossible for Sisera and his forces. Barak needed only to believe and obey.

Faith: Biblical faith is the ____________, or trusting, in Christ alone for salvation. It is not blind faith for it rests on the ________________ life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

How has faith in God, specifically in Jesus, helped you to face with confidence your fears and fights?
Point 3: God’s faithful people glorify Him for working through them (Judg. 5:1-5,9-11).

1 On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang:

2 When the leaders lead in Israel, when the people volunteer, blessed be the LORD.

3 Listen, kings! Pay attention, princes! I will sing to the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel. 4 LORD, when you came from Seir, when you marched from the fields of Edom, the earth trembled, the skies poured rain, and the clouds poured water. 5 The mountains melted before the LORD, even Sinai, before the LORD, the God of Israel.

My heart is with the leaders of Israel, with the volunteers of the people. Blessed be the LORD! 10 You who ride on white donkeys, who sit on saddle blankets, and who travel on the road, give praise! 11 Let them tell the righteous acts of the LORD, the righteous deeds of his warriors in Israel, with the voices of the singers at the watering places. Then the LORD’s people went down to the city gates.

There is nothing wrong with acknowledging the faithfulness of God’s people. Actually, it would be wrong of us not to. God has recorded their faithfulness in Scripture, in part, so we might find encouragement from them. Deborah led through her wisdom, prophecy, and wise judgment. Barak led with his sword and his ability to gather an army. But neither one sought acclaim for themselves; their song of praise was to the Lord. Any victory we experience is not birthed through our abilities but is a gift from God, who provided the plan and the power to achieve victory.

Why might it be difficult for us to glorify God for the victories we experience?

When we experience the victory of the Lord, it is a good and right thing to sing His praises. When we do, our singing in worship goes before three audiences:

• When we sing, our songs of worship are to be offered to the Lord as sacrifices of praise.
• When we sing, we also sing to ourselves.
• When we sing, our third audience is others.
My Mission

Because we have been given a number of gifts from God, including salvation through Jesus, we use each of our gifts to build up the body of Christ, the church, as we encourage others to do the same.

- How will you live in trusting obedience because of Jesus, the Wonderful Counselor, our perfect Savior and Judge?
- What are some ways your group can better encourage one another toward deeper dependence on God and faithfulness to Him?
- Who needs to hear of God’s work in your life? What will you do to praise God and share it with them this week?

Notes
Daily Study

Day 1: Read Judges 4:1-7

“The Israelites *again* did what was evil in the sight of the Lord” (Judg. 4:1).

*Again.*

Does that word haunt you? It should. Like an accusing finger, the word *again* forces us to look deep within ourselves and ask God to uncover the areas where we fall short … *again*. Areas we are refusing to hand over to God and are instead pursuing our own pleasure and glory or are trying to find victory in our own power … *again*: “I yelled at my kids … *again*.” “I lied about my past … *again*.” “I found myself jealous of her perfect life … *again*.”

These “agains” never agree with God’s moral will. The agains of sin remind us that we are not looking to the power of God, through the Holy Spirit, to live fully in us. It’s not that we’re not trying hard enough; in fact, it may be that we’re trying too hard in our own power (Eph. 6:10). Instead, we must pray to the God of power: “Keep your servant from willful sins; do not let them rule me” (Ps. 19:13).

God has promised His presence and His power. Even when we suffer for our *again* sins, He has already made plans for our triumph and His glory. And He is right there pouring out His mercy, grace, love, and forgiveness over us … *again*.

What are the *again* sins in your life? How can you surrender that area of your life to God’s control?
Day 2: Read Judges 4:8-24

Jael’s story is about proving one’s allegiance. Her husband, Heber, had chosen to leave his people, the Kenites, and live in the land claimed by King Jabin of Canaan and controlled by Sisera, both of whom opposed God and His people. Though Scripture does not tell us what Jael thought of God and God’s people, her actions do.

Sisera, wide-eyed and panicked, fled the battle that God was fighting for the Israelites, and he sought safety in the tent of his ally Heber. Jael, innocent and hospitable, invited him in under the guise of protection, but then she drove a tent peg through his temple while he was sleeping, crushing this enemy of God’s people. Just as God said it would happen through Deborah, God sold Sisera into the hands of a woman (v. 9).

Many times as Christians, we talk about what we believe. We are quick to read books, attend church gatherings, and say we’re praying. But do our actions prove our allegiance to Christ or are they betraying our claims to be Christ’s followers? Do our actions match our words and our faith, pointing people to the life-changing power of the gospel?

Where is God calling you to take a stand for Him? What in your life is demonstrating your faith?

Day 3: Read Judges 5:1-11

Over time, we tend to exaggerate what was good in the past as we simultaneously forget its pains and problems. The “good ol’ days” are often tinted by the rose-colored glasses of nostalgia that we choose to wear. But we are wise to look back objectively and say: “Look where we’ve come from! Look at how much we messed things up. But look at how kind God has been to bring us to where we are today!” In doing so, we are more able to see God’s grace in our lives and give Him the praise He deserves, just as Deborah’s song of praise vividly recalled the Israelites’ hardest times in Judges 5:6-8.

When the past comes to mind and the pain comes with it, we can praise God for the fact that we’re not there anymore. He gives comfort and peace. He provides companions to walk with us through tough times. So we can praise Him today for yesterday’s troubles, or if still in that season, we can praise Him today for not abandoning us along the way.

How can you see God’s hand in your past, even in the most difficult times? How can you rejoice in Him for that today?
Day 4: Read Judges 5:12-23

The Israelites sang some lines about Barak in Judges 5:12-23.

Barak, the leader of the Israelite army whose fears were real. The military man who refused to go into battle alone and demanded Deborah go with him. In the midst of all his faults, this part of the song remembers the victory; his prisoners (v. 12) and his leadership (v. 15) made it in the annals of history.

The grace and favor we find in Barak’s story reminds us that we can cut others—and ourselves—a little slack for our moments of fear. Say what you will about his shortcomings, but Barak believed with the little faith he could muster, and God used it to bring victory over one of the most feared armies of his day.

We’re rarely going to get it all right, but the faith of a small mustard seed is all we need to see God triumph. He will lead and He will provide; we just need to believe. The victory depends on Him, not us.

Where do you need to show mercy to yourself and others?

Day 5: Read Judges 5:24-31

Jael was to be considered the most blessed of women. Why? Because she killed the enemy of God and His people. She took a tent peg and a hammer and crushed the head of Sisera. The once-proud commander of nine hundred chariots fled on foot from the battle he expected to win and fell dead from the hands and at the feet of a humble, unassuming, tent-dwelling woman. O how the mighty have fallen.

The song of Deborah and Barak praises Jael for her act of faith. But it also points to the fall of Sisera as a picture for the fall of all of God’s enemies. May they all be crushed so the people of God may rise like the blazing strength of the sun.

One day, all of God’s enemies will be crushed in hell, and all of God’s people will rise in resurrection and life, but only because the blessed Son of God Himself was crushed for our iniquities (Isa. 53:5). By faith in Jesus, we receive His blessing of eternal life and the eternal victory over the enemies of sin and death.

How will you live in light of Jesus’ eternal victory over sin and death on behalf of those who believe? How will you spread the praise of this wonderful Savior throughout the world?
Encourage One Another

Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- God’s faithful people use their gifts in service to Him (Judg. 4:4-7).
- God’s faithful people courageously face impossible odds (Judg. 4:14-16).
- God’s faithful people glorify Him for working through them (Judg. 5:1-5,9-11).

Questions:

- How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?
- When have you observed God's faithfulness during a seemingly impossible situation? How did this encourage you at the time?
- How can your group help one another use God's gifts in service to Him, to His people, and for His gospel mission?

Notes

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UNIT 7
SESSION 1
1. Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2009) [eBook].

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

SESSION 4

UNIT 8
SESSION 1
1. Noël Piper, *Treasuring God in our Traditions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 64.

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

EASTER SESSION

UNIT 9
SESSION 1

SESSION 2

SESSION 3

SESSION 4

SESSION 5
In these sessions of The Gospel Project, we experience some of the most exciting narratives in Scripture. There are accounts here of sin and judgment, of moral decline and merciful intervention, and of rescuers who need rescue. Through it all, one thing is clear: God is with His people and He is faithful to His promise.

It’s important to keep that central theme in mind because many people read these stories about the conquest of the land and try to find examples for emulation. To be clear, we can learn a lot from these Old Testament heroes (see 1 Cor. 10), but we cannot implement their virtues apart from our connection to the Vine—Jesus Christ Himself, the One who bears fruit in us and through us.

As we walk through our present wilderness, struggling against sin and encountering sorrow, we know that the God who has gone before us is faithful. He is the One who prepares the way for us to be His ambassadors. He is the One who breaks the chains of our idolatry and lifts our gaze to His unchanging glory.