

## 05

JUDGES 4

## GOD'S TOOLS

## opening ILLUSTRATION

Open your meeting time by asking, “Does anyone see any tools around this room?” (There’s a pretty good chance that the answer should be no but you may have a stray tool if there is an improvement or repair going on in your room. Acknowledge it but move on.) Say, “We may not see any/many traditional tools in here, but let’s think creatively. Does anyone have a tool I could use to calculate a tip at a restaurant?” (Students can use the calculator app on their phones.) “Does anyone have a tool that would hold a cracked egg?” (Students might suggest a shoe.) “Does anyone have a tool that would keep out the sunshine?” (Students might suggest a blanket or a jacket.) Say something like this: “Our traditional definition of ‘tool’ makes us think of hammers, screwdrivers, and nails. But we have other tools that we can use to be obedient to God and to help others. In today’s passage, we’re going to look for some untraditional tools used in Judges 4.”

## context

Today’s passage focuses on two women, Deborah and Jael, as the heroes of the story. Women holding positions of leadership in our 21st-century world is far less notable than it was in the 11th century BC. Culture at that time was overwhelmingly patriarchal; women were certainly valued for being wives and mothers, but were not usually in authority outside of her own children. Still, the Bible—even the Old Testament—held women in high regard even as society diminished them. The wife of noble character (see Prov. 31:10-31) is highly praised for her abilities as a wife and mother but also for being wise in commerce, investing, and wisdom. Jesus later raised women up by respecting and honoring them.

## expository OUTLINE

**JUDGES 4:1-10** *When God appoints us to a job, He enables us to do it.* Long before the superhero genre was all the rage, God had His own list of super heroes; Deborah was one of them. At a time in history when women were not elected to political positions, chosen to lead businesses, or often honored, we see that people looked up to Deborah and her wisdom in settling disputes. Not only that, but God had appointed her as a judge. And it’s a good thing, because the enemy of the Israelites were the Canaanites, led by King Jabin and his army commander, Sisera. Debora chose a man named Barak and gave him specific instructions to go out, take ten thousand men from two tribes, and fight. But Barak—and everyone around him—knew that Jabin had nine hundred iron chariots, the newest and best wartime technology. Barak and the people around him were petrified. Barak meekly accepted the role, but only if Deborah would accompany him. She warned him that the glory of victory would go to a woman; how very true that prophecy was.

**JUDGES 4:12-16** *God is not only with us in our battles, but He can cause our enemies to panic.* Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, had the technological advantage, but Barak had the Lord fighting on his side. It seems perhaps that Barak hesitated before truly engaging the army of Sisera, but Deborah encouraged him to act (see v. 14), reminding him that the Lord had handed his enemy over. Ten thousand men would usually be no match for nine hundred chariots unless the Lord of heaven’s armies goes first and throws the enemy “into a panic” (v. 15). So instead of standing to fight when Barak and his men arrived, they scattered! Sisera, the commander, fled on foot, even though he had those nine hundred shiny chariots. Barak was wildly victorious because the Lord was truly going before him and his army.

**JUDGES 4:10,17-24** *We use the tools we have and know to God’s glory.* The Kenites were not Israelites; they were a nomadic people related to Moses’s father-in-law. We’re told in verse 11 that one of the Kenites, Heber, was living near Kedesh, the battle site of Barak and his army versus Sisera and the chariots; not a great place to be. When Sisera fled, he was probably relieved to see that Heber the Kenite had his tent nearby, because “there was peace between King Jabin of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite” (v. 17). Jael greeted him, invited him into her tent, and gave him some milk. She was the picture of hospitality! But when Sisera fell asleep on Jael’s floor, she picked up a tent stake and hammer and killed him with it. Brutal, for sure, but the Kenites were nomads, moving around all the time; there’s no doubt Jael knew how to wield a hammer and tent peg! So Deborah’s prophecy came true as Jael revealed to Barak that she had killed their oppressor’s commander.

## group DISCUSSION

The following are suggested discussion questions on each section of verses. They can be used for leading a small group session, or in sermon deliveries that include discussion.

### ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 4:1-10.

- .01** How long had the Israelites been oppressed by Jabin and Sisera? What do you notice about their time of sinful disobedience (see Judg. 3:8,14)?
- .02** How would you describe the Israelites attitude and emotional state in this chapter? Why? How do emotions and attitudes affect your life and faith?

### ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 4:12-16.

- .03** What might your reaction be to the sight of the sight of nine hundred chariots in battle formation? How does that help you understand this passage from Barak's point of view?
- .04** What makes you fearful? How might Deborah's assurance in verse 14 be a comfort to you?

### ASK A STUDENT TO READ JUDGES 4:10,17-24.

- .05** How did Jael's words to Barak in verse 18 reflect Deborah's encouragement to him in verse 14?
- .06** How has someone encouraged you lately? How can you receive that encouragement as from the Lord?

## session CONNECTION

God called the Israelites—the descendants of Abraham—to be His covenant people, but throughout the Bible He consistently also opened his family to any people who would come to Him as Lord God. We see that clearly in Judges 4, when God used Jael's hammer and peg to save His people from the oppression at the hands of the Canaanites. Jael was not an Israelite, but she was faithful to God's leading in her life. We also see God's extended offer to the Gentiles in Mark 7:24-30, when the Gentile woman approached Jesus and asked Him to heal her daughter. Jesus reminded her that the Jews were His priority; she agreed but pointed out that God did not exclude the Gentiles. We see non-Jews included in the genealogy of Christ and counted among the early church.

## application

Remind students of the opening illustration, in which they considered some unusual tools in the room. Point to the "tools" used in Judges 4: Deborah used her tool of influence, Barak used his tool of battle, and Jael used a tent peg and a hammer to defeat the enemy of Israel. Say, "God calls each of His children to obedience, and sometimes that will require us to use the tools He has put at our disposal." Help learners consider tools they already possess: kind words, a listening ear, time, friendship, helpfulness, an extra Bible, or even a good joke. Point out that God can use any skill, spiritual gift, or personality to bless others. Close with prayer, asking students to clearly see different tools they have and offer them willingly to God so that you can bring Him glory and bless others.

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