

# Willingly

## Judges 5

For those who were not here last week, Judges 5 is a song based on Judges 4. It is a celebration of victory and a commentary on the battle. It provides us some clarity on what happened and why. So, let me give you the 60 second summary of what happened in Judges 4. After the death the judge Ehud, Israel sins again. God sells them into the hands of the Canaanite king named Jabin. His general, named Sisera, leads an army of 900 chariots and thousands of men, to rape, pillage, and oppress Israel cruelly for 20 years. Israel cries and God responds. Deborah, the first and only woman Judge, calls up a man named Barak and tells him to gather an army to fight Sisera. Barak fearfully responds with—"I will only if you come with me." Deborah agrees but tells him that glory will go to a woman instead of him in the victory. They battle and, as promised, God destroys the Canaanite army while Sisera escapes on foot. He tries to hide with Jael, the wife of an ally, who eventually assassinates him as he sleeps by crushing his head with a tent peg.

Now Deborah and Barak sing a victory song, just like Moses and Miriam did when God saved them through the Red Sea and drowned Pharaoh's army. In her song, Deborah praises the Lord for delivering them and she also highlights those who willingly participated in the battle.

**1 Then Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam sang on that day, saying:**

**2 "When leaders lead in Israel, When the people willingly offer themselves,  
Bless the Lord!**

**3 "Hear, O kings! Give ear, O princes! I, even I, will sing to the Lord; I will sing  
praise to the Lord God of Israel.**

Our key verse is verse 2, **"When leaders lead in Israel, When the people willingly offer themselves, Bless the Lord!"**

The leaders lead and the people willingly offered themselves. So, praise the Lord! They praise God because the leaders actually lead, after years of little or no leadership at all. And because the leaders led, the people (at least some of them) followed. Many volunteered to join their Israelite brethren in going to war against the Canaanites. Deborah praises the Lord for the contributions of both the leaders and the volunteers to Israel's victory over the Canaanites. Each did his job: the leaders led, and the people willingly volunteered.

This is a great picture of how ministry is supposed to work in the church as well. Each of us has a part to play. The leaders lead, the people willingly serve and the glory goes to God. What's your place in the family of God? Do you have a part to play? If so, what is it?

As Deborah celebrates God's victory over the Canaanites, and as she describes her own role, and the roles that others had, I want us to consider what our part might be in the body of Christ.

Time will not allow me to attempt to expound this song in detail, but I think we can quickly summarize the flow of song.

Verses 3-11 link the giving of the Law at Sinai with the deliverance of the Israelites from the Canaanites under Deborah and Barak. At Sinai, God made a covenant with Israel. His presence and power at Sinai were demonstrated with signs in the heavens and on the earth. The earth quaked and the heavens brought forth rain, testifying to the presence of God (**verses 4 and 5**).

**4 "Lord, when You went out from Seir, When You marched from the field of Edom, The earth trembled and the heavens poured, The clouds also poured water;**

**5 The mountains gushed before the Lord, This Sinai, before the Lord God of Israel.**

Now in Judges just like in the Exodus Israel's deliverance was due to God's grace and power. The Israelites were ill-equipped and powerless before the Canaanites and their chariots, but God intervened, employing nature to defeat those who oppressed His people. Israel had nothing but a rag-tag army, with virtually no weapons. It was an army with a woman leading those who went to battle, Deborah, a "mother in Israel" (**verses 6-8**).

**6 "In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, In the days of Jael, The highways were deserted, And the travelers walked along the byways.**

**7 Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel, Until I, Deborah, arose, Arose a mother in Israel.**

**8 They chose new gods; Then there was war in the gates; Not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel.**

It looked as though Israel was about to suffer a great slaughter. But now, thanks to the victory God has brought about, God's people are urged to join in praising God for His salvation (**verses 9-11**).

**9 My heart is with the rulers of Israel Who offered themselves willingly with the people. Bless the Lord!**

**10 "Speak, you who ride on white donkeys, Who sit in judges' attire, And who walk along the road.**

**11 Far from the noise of the archers, among the watering places, There they shall recount the righteous acts of the Lord, The righteous acts for His villagers in Israel; Then the people of the Lord shall go down to the gates.**

Leading this peasant army was Barak, accompanied by Deborah. Deborah was instructed to awake and to sing a song. Barak was told to lead away the captives.

**12 "Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, sing a song! Arise, Barak, and lead your captives away, O son of Abinoam!**

**13 "Then the survivors came down, the people against the nobles; The Lord came down for me against the mighty.**

Now they sing of the volunteers who gave themselves willingly identifying them by tribe in **verses 14 and 15**.

**14 From Ephraim were those whose roots were in Amalek. After you,  
Benjamin, with your peoples, From Machir rulers came down, And from  
Zebulun those who bear the recruiter's staff.**

**15 And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; As Issachar, so was Barak  
Sent into the valley under his command; Among the divisions of Reuben  
There were great resolves of heart.**

In **verses 16-18**, we see a stark contrast between the “workers” and the “shirkers”. Zebulun and Naphtali put their lives on the line, while while Reuben, Gilead, Asher, and Dan shrunk back from their duty. And for this they are condemned.

**16 Why did you sit among the sheepfolds, To hear the pipings for the flocks?  
The divisions of Reuben have great searchings of heart.**

**17 Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan, And why did Dan remain on ships? Asher  
continued at the seashore, And stayed by his inlets.**

**18 Zebulun is a people who jeopardized their lives to the point of death,  
Naphtali also, on the heights of the battlefield.**

They used excuses like, “we have to look after our flocks”; “it’s too far from us, we can’t go”; Our business is more important than your battle.

**Verses 19-23** describe, in poetic language, the battle that was fought between the Canaanites and the Israelites.

**19 "The kings came and fought, Then the kings of Canaan fought In Taanach,  
by the waters of Megiddo; They took no spoils of silver.**

**20 They fought from the heavens; The stars from their courses fought against  
Sisera.**

**21 The torrent of Kishon swept them away, That ancient torrent, the torrent of  
Kishon. O my soul, march on in strength!**

**22 Then the horses' hooves pounded, The galloping, galloping of his steeds.**

**23 'Curse Meroz,' said the angel of the Lord, 'Curse its inhabitants bitterly,  
Because they did not come to the help of the Lord, To the help of the Lord  
against the mighty.'**

The kings of Canaan came and fought, but they did not prevail, and they took away no spoils of war. God called the forces of nature into “active duty” and employed them in defeating the Canaanites (verses 20-21). The “stars” joined in the fight, doing battle against Sisera. Torrential rains turned the river Kishon into a raging flood. The Canaanites’ chariots were immobilized and their horses traumatized (verse 22). In verse 23, a curse is pronounced against the city of Meroz, for while others came to the aid of their brethren, the people of this city did not.

**Verses 24-27** are a poetic, but very graphic, description of the slaying of Sisera, at the hand of Jael. Here, she gets the glory that would have been Barak’s.

**24 "Most blessed among women is Jael, The wife of Heber the Kenite; Blessed  
is she among women in tents.**

**25 He asked for water, she gave milk; She brought out cream in a lordly bowl.**

**26 She stretched her hand to the tent peg, Her right hand to the workmen's hammer; She pounded Sisera, she pierced his head, She split and struck through his temple.**

**27 At her feet he sank, he fell, he lay still; At her feet he sank, he fell; Where he sank, there he fell dead.**

Jael is blessed as a woman among women. She was the victor. She had prevailed over the arch enemy of Israel. Three times in verse 27 it is said that Sisera bowed at the feet of Jael. This refers, I think, to his posture in sleep, but the song sees more to it than that; in so doing, he unwittingly demonstrates her greatness.

**Verses 28-30** paint a very dramatic picture of the enemy. Once again this is given "from a woman's point of view." This stanza focuses on the mother of Sisera, waiting for her son to return, triumphant in battle, as he has done so many times before over the past 20 years. But time passes, and the sound of hoofbeats is not heard. Why the delay? Has something gone wrong? Surely the victory was so decisive and the spoils so great that more time was required to gather them and to bring them home.

**28 "The mother of Sisera looked through the window, And cried out through the lattice, 'Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarries the clatter of his chariots?'**

**29 Her wisest ladies answered her, Yes, she answered herself,**

**30 'Are they not finding and dividing the spoil: To every man a girl or two; For Sisera, plunder of dyed garments, Plunder of garments embroidered and dyed, Two pieces of dyed embroidery for the neck of the looter?'**

Verse 31 concludes the song with blessing and cursing. If Deborah saw the power of God at Sinai repeated in the war with Sisera, she now sees this battle as a pattern of God's future dealings with men. Let all the enemies of God perish, just as the Canaanites have in this battle. And let all those who love God be blessed, rising like the sun in all its glory and power.

**31 "Thus let all Your enemies perish, O Lord! But let those who love Him be like the sun When it comes out in full strength." So the land had rest for forty years.**

This almost sounds like a repetition of the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1-3)? Let those who bless God's people be blessed; let those who curse them be cursed. Those fellow-Israelites who came to the aid of their brethren were blessed. Those who refused to help were cursed, like the Canaanites who opposed God's people.

In those dark days of the judges, the leaders shrunk back, and there were few who were willing to follow. There seemed to be no one to fight the enemy, the Canaanites. But through the ministry of Deborah, leaders and followers emerged, and the battle was fought and won.

Today, it is very little different than in Deborah's day. In Ephesians 4, Paul basically says that a church will be healthy and grow when the leaders lead and the people willingly serve. Listen to how he describes the church:

**11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,**

**12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,**

**13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;**

To have a united, growing, Christ-like church: First,

1. The Leaders Lead (Eph. 4:11-12a)

These leaders are given to the church by Christ himself, who is the head of the church—**“And He Himself gave some.”** Their job is to equip the saints, the believers in Christ, the members of the church.

2. The People Serve. (Eph. 12)

The saints do the work of ministry. They willingly offer themselves to serve in the church.

3. The Church Grows (Eph 4:13)

This edifies, builds up the church. The result is that we all become more like Christ.

4. The Glory is Christ's (Eph 4:13)

There is a great deal that needs to be done in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. There are Sunday School classes to be taught, believers to be discipled, evangelism to be carried out, reaching out to the lost and reaching in to encourage the saved, and on and on the needs go. Do you hear the call of God to leadership, to service? What has God called you to do? Are you called to lead? Then do it, trusting in God to work through your weakness. Has He called you to serve? Then offer yourself willingly. Do what needs to be done!

When God raises up leaders who lead, and God's people willingly serve—Praise the Lord! Bless God! All the honor and glory belongs to Him.