

OLD TESTAMENT WOMEN: Jael

2 Timothy 3:16–7(NLT)

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

Do you believe this Scripture to be true? Well, we are going to put this Scripture to the test today. 3rd in our series on OT women Today I want to look at Jael. Not very well known. Read her story. Then we are going to grapple with the question. If all scripture is useful for us, how does her teach us, prepare us, equip us.

Read Judges 4 What is your immediate reaction to this story? Brutal. Cold blooded murder. Yet in the next chapter she is praised as the most blessed of women. What do you reckon the story is useful for?

Lets unpack this story a little bit and grapple with what we can learn from this story because Scripture is useful. Clearly it is not a license for us to go around murdering people. No matter how bad they might be.

Israelites had rebelled against God. And so God allowed them to be oppressed by a king by the name of Jabin whose base was in Hazor. Jabin had terrorized the people of Israel for 20 years. It says in next chapter that the highways had been deserted because people were fearful of travel. This would have impacted trade and economic survival. His army commander was Sisea. We learn again in Ch 5 that one of the ways in terrorized them was by rape. His mother of all people talks about the army taking the spoils of war. "A girl or two for each man." The word used for women is the word womb. ie they were simply sexual objects.

We are introduced to another female Deborah. She is a judge prophetess at a time which was not normal for a woman to be in such a role. But she was clearly leadership role. She has authority over Barak and commands him to take on Sisera and his army. 900 iron chariots was a formidable army. Barak is not too keen on the task, despite Deborah telling him that God has commanded him to do this. He says that he will only go if she goes. Seems he basically did not fully believe that God was going with him. Although having said that he is listed in Hebrews hall of faith, as a hero of the faith. Deborah says she will go but the honor will go to a woman. In a male dominated world, only men were soldiers so basically he will be shamed.

God will use those whom others consider weak, to achieve his purposes. God also knew in advance what was going to happen. This is the power of the sovereignty of God. It doesn't mean that Jael was a puppet but God knew what she would do. So Barak goes into battle. Again from Ch 4 it is not clear why he won. Read about it in Ch 5. God brought about a very heavy rain. Sisera and his troops lost their

strategic advantage. Chariots all get bogged and stuck in the river. Barak and his army are able to swoop in and defeated them.

Now we get introduced to Jael. (name means Mountain goat) In Hebrew Jael is spelt Yael and is one of the most common female names in Israel today. First we get introduced to Heber, whose husband is a Kenite. Kenites are possibly descendant of Cain, Adam and Eve's son Heber is a descendant of Moses father in law. Kenites were nomadic, lived in tents with a strong possibility that they were black smiths. Metal workers. We know they settled with the Israelites in the land which suggests that they had assimilated and taken on board the worship of Yahweh. But it says here the Heber had moved his tent closer to king Jabin, and made peace with them. Remember Jabin was the king who for the last 20 years had been terrorizing Israel. But he had chosen to move his tents closer to Israel's enemy and made peace with them. Now if he is a metal worker, then good chance he was working on the chariots.

Sisera flees the battle, as the only survivor, and his path takes him towards Heber's tents. And he would have known this would be a safe place to go. In the ancient world, hospitality was core value. But it appears that Jael takes the initiative in this encounter. She comes out and greets him, invites him into her tent. Men and women had separate tents in those days. She is on her own and invites him into her own tent. Not normal. He is exhausted, asks for water and she gives him milk (Ch 5 says curdled milk which is yogurt. Known to make you sleepy.) She tucks him up in bed. In the Hebrew there is quite a bit of sexual innuendo. So possibly she lured him into her tent. We don't know. But anyway he is exhausted and falls asleep. After fleeing for his life, seeing his army killed, he feels he is safe. Now women in those days were responsible for putting the tents up. She Jael would have been well used to banging in tent pegs and the text says she snuck up on him and whacked the tent peg through his temple.

Why did she do it? Can't fully know. Was she scared she would be raped like other women. Maybe Was she as Israelite? Not sure but the experts suggest by the spelling of her name she wasn't. It seems the most likely is that she aligned herself with God of the Israelites. This is an incredible act of defiance. She risks her life for a people that are not her own. She explicitly acts against her husband's wishes. She is a female and they did not act like this.

She has seen in the oppression of the people of God. She has seen the rapes and the violence. She has in a sense said. I need to do something. Here is the opportunity for me to act in alignment with God and free the people I identify with from oppression. When the opportunity presented she acted. She had done nothing to bring it about. When the opportunity arose, she took the initiative and acted. I think this is the primary purpose we can take from this story.



She was a woman in a man's world. She had no power. No authority. But she did not stand back and do nothing. She acted and God used her to bring peace to the land. God uses often the most unlikely of people to bring about his purposes.

Sometimes God presents opportunities to us. WE have to decide: Am I going to align with the purposes of God or am I going to sit back and do nothing? Am I going to go against the people I love to do what is right in God's eyes?

At times when God puts us in a situation when we are going to have to choose who we align ourselves with. When God is being rubbished in your work place, are you going to sit back or are you going to speak up. When a colleague is being bullied, are you going to align yourself with justice, or are you going to sit back and say. Not my problem. When subtle sexual harassment is happening at work, what are we going to do.?

Rosa Parks was a African American women in the racist south of America. As an African American, she was expected to move seats to the back of the bus as the white section at the front filled up. She would have seen and experienced this many times in her life just as she would have seen her family be forced to segregate in public places. She had seen where she worked by burned down by whites. She had seen her people beaten, oppressed, raped and de humanized. And one day, 1943 after a long shift at work, when she was asked to stand to make room for a white person she refused. She decided that day she would make a stand. She was arrested and tried in court and fined. But her actions that day set off a boycott of the buses that went for over a year, and eventually caused a change in the law. It was a pivotal moment in the fight for justice in southern America. One women deciding that she needed to act. It cost her job. Her husband was fired. Received abuse and death threats. But one woman had the courage to act.

On 5th Nov 1861 several thousand Māori decided they needed to act at Parihaka. They could have decided to flee after they were told to leave their land by the NZ government of the day. They could have decided to fight with weapons But influenced by their faith, they decided to make a stand for justice. The government had already imprisoned several hundred ploughman who had defied the government, sending them to imprisonment in caves in Dunedin. When the released men went back and continued their actions the govt of the day gave the villagers of Parihaka 14 days to leave. They did not leave. On 5 November, about 1600 volunteers and troops were ordered to march on the village. A canon was set up on the small hill overlooking the marae. But the leaders and people had decided they would act with no violence, no matter what happened. They sat on the ground and the children sang songs. More than 1500 men, women and children were forcibly removed, transported to their original tribal areas and abandoned without food or support. Some of the women were raped by the troops, with some having children as a result. The homes and marae were destroyed.

This is a remarkable story that every NZ and every Christian in NZ should know.

Sometimes we find ourselves in a place where God is calling us to act. To do something. Because doing nothing is not the right thing. Doing nothing is siding with the injustice. With the lies of the enemy

Sometimes God wants us to do something.

The story of Jael is a story about a woman who chose to act. In spite of her husband. In spite of the risks. She could not sit back and do nothing.

I was sitting around with some of my mates at the tennis club recently. Most of them are not Christians, the discussion turned to the election and in particular issue around Te Roa and Maoridom. I had heard the views before and knew they would be racist. And I decided I could not sit back and say nothing. I needed to gently push back and challenge what was being said. I needed to act because to not say anything made me complicit with what was being said. I needed to challenge some of the appalling racism, and mistruths that were being spouted.

Where is God challenging you to act? To speak up for justice. To act on behalf of the oppressed. To acknowledge your faith. To step out in prayer and pray for someone who is sick. To share your story of how God is central to your life Where is God asking you to make a stand. And to act.

That is the challenge of Jael. One woman changed the course of history for the people of God. One woman when faced with a critical moment decided she needed to align herself with the God of the universe.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

Why do we tend to skip over stories like this?

How do we reconcile the violence in the Old Testament with the call of Jesus to love our enemies?

Where might we be called to take a stand that goes against the views of those we love? Have you been in this situation?

Can you think of a time when you had opportunity to align yourself with God and his kingdom but did not take it? What prevented you?

How could Christians stand up for justice and equality in NZ? Should we speak up for the marginalised? Who are they?

What do you think the cost was to Jael in taking this action? Are NZ Christians willing to pay the price of taking action?



CENTRAL BAPTIST

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