

Episode 259

Sandra Richter: Deborah the judge and prophetess, and her message to us today

00:00:01 - James Early

Hey there, everybody. Welcome again to the Bible speaks to you podcast. I'm so glad you've tuned in to listen today. I'm really excited about my guest, Sandra Richter. We're going to be talking about Deborah, the prophet and judge in the Old Testament. Sandy, welcome to the Bible speaks to you podcast.

00:00:20 - Sandy Richter

It is lovely to be here, James. Thank you so much for the invitation.

00:00:25 - James Early

Well, I'm just so grateful that you're here. You're in Southern California, is that right?

00:00:32 - Sandy Richter

I am where we have 300 days of sunshine a year. So I'm sitting out here in the sunshine, partly because my house is noisy. So it's better to be back here.

00:00:46 - James Early

She's got a bird of paradise plant behind her and it's just, it's a very tropical feeling. So anyway, so glad you're here today. Let me tell you a little bit about Sandy. Just a little. She's got a bio that could take the whole podcast. Sandra Richter is the Robert H. Gundry chair of biblical studies at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California. By the way, that's a really big deal. That's very impressive.

00:01:17 - Sandy Richter

Well, thank you.

00:01:18 - James Early

Yeah, she earned her PhD in Hebrew Bible from Harvard University, and she got her MA in theological studies from Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. And she's taught at Asbury Theological Seminary, Wesley Biblical Seminary, Wheaton College. And she's a member of the new international Version Translation Committee. That's pretty amazing.

00:01:43 - Sandy Richter

It's pretty fun, too, I bet.

00:01:46 - James Early

Well, now, is that an ongoing thing? I mean, do you revise it every once in a while or.

00:01:52 - Sandy Richter

Yeah, the committee, well, Biblica, who is the publishing body behind the NIV, they are committed to keeping a living translation. So new international version. The idea is to keep the translation abreast with the transitions in the English language. So although we published the first version in 1984, of course, English continues to morph and change. And we have English speakers on the committee from India, Australia, the UK, Africa. So, yes, the ambition is to keep the version alive. And so we have two or three revision ambitions running all the time. One is new scholarship, which will have regular proposals that are updating idioms or new understanding of various passages because of anthropological, socioeconomic, archaeological data, that sort of thing. So that's always on running. Then we also have stylists who are working on the text constantly, asking questions like, is it time to incorporate contractions into the NIV? And if we are going to have.

00:03:18 - James Early

Contractions, oh, my goodness.

00:03:20 - Sandy Richter

I know. Who gets to speak in contractions? Does the almighty speak in contractions? Does Jeremiah speak in contractions.

00:03:29 - James Early

Oh, my.

00:03:30 - Sandy Richter

Yeah. All of that is running all the time. And then we are assigned to, oh, I don't know, three or four books a year to reread in English and see if we find any junctures that are awkward or unclear. So all of those things are running all the time.

00:03:49 - James Early

Well, you know, that's really good to know. I love the NIV, and I wasn't aware that it was such a living translation, because things do are always changing, and that's really good. Something else I want to tell you guys listening about Sandy is you can tell she has carved out a space for herself in the academic world with all her accomplishments, and they're still ongoing. But the thing that I really love about Sandy is that one of her passions is to bring the people in the Bible and the places they live and the situations they are in bring them to life in the Bible narrative to show how their lives and situations are really pretty much just like ours. Yes, that's what I try to do a

little bit on the podcast, and I just love that because I think the more we can relate to someone's situation, the type of person they are, the circumstances, sometimes even the geography of the lay in the land, we understand things better. How far is this city from that city? And they walk. I mean, that changes the way we see it.

00:04:56 - Sandy Richter
Absolutely.

00:04:57 - James Early
So, anyway, that's what I love about you. One more quick thing about Sandy before we get started, is she's written lots of things. Some books, several books I just want to mention. She has a series called the Epic of Eden. And there's a book which is a Christian entry into the Old Testament. She has one on the book of psalms. She has one that she calls the stewards of Eden. And it's about what scripture says about the environment and why it matters. I really love that. I got to get that. And then what we're going to be talking about today is her book about Deborah and the unlikely heroes in the book of judges.

00:05:39 - Sandy Richter
Yes.

00:05:40 - James Early
Really excited about digging into that. Oh, I guess the other thing I want to tell you guys listening is that she has two daughters. She lives in southern California, as I said, with birds of paradise growing in her backyard. What a life.

00:05:55 - Sandy Richter
And chickens. I got chickens on the other side.

00:05:58 - James Early
Oh, chickens.

00:05:59 - Sandy Richter
I do. I do.

00:06:01 - James Early
How many chickens? That's the question.

00:06:03 - Sandy Richter

Well, right now there are only four. We've had as many as six and as few as three. We've only lost two over the course of about five years of raising them, which is a really good record, by the way.

00:06:18 - James Early

That is good. Yeah.

00:06:19 - Sandy Richter

And we've had to give a few away because they were just a little too vocal for our neighbors, so we've dealt with that too. But right now, Greta, Lucy, Mags, and Goose, you like the fact that I have a chicken named Goose?

00:06:36 - James Early

Absolutely.

00:06:37 - Sandy Richter

Happily doing their little chicken noises over on the other side of my backyard, so.

00:06:43 - James Early

Oh, that's cool. So before we get started, Sandy, I'd love to know, what is God doing in your life right now?

00:06:51 - Sandy Richter

Well, the semester just started, so one of the primary things I'm doing right now is scrambling and scrambling hard academics. We always have a summer full of objectives, publishing wise, speaking wise, and I over scheduled mine. I know that would just stun you. So I've been working on Deuteronomy commentary all summer, and I been in every time zone in the States, oh, and in Scotland with the NIV committee. So a lot going on. Right now, I'm just trying to get my elementary Hebrew grammar students settled and confident that, yes, you can do this. And my intro to Old Testament students excited about the idea of getting to know the real people who lived in the real places of the Old Testament. So those are the tasks that are at hand, and always a few more than I can handle. I'm gonna guess you can relate to that story.

00:07:59 - James Early

Oh, totally. We all jump in sometimes to too much stuff. Well, we're gonna jump into Deborah now, and we're gonna talk about your book in just a little bit. But I just interested in what got you interested in Deborah in the first place. What was it that jumped out at you about Deborah?

00:08:17 - Sandy Richter

Yeah, I love that question. So, as you said, I'm an academic, so I do all the boring things that academics always do. But my heart is with the church, and it always has been. So a big part of my professional ambition is to take all the cool stuff I learned as an academic and make it accessible to the church, and not by dumbing it down. That frustrates me so much that. Gosh, in the church, we offer people how to be a Christian 101 for 30 years. How about we expand that repertoire a little bit? Yeah. So a big part of what I do is the epic of Eden Bible study series, and the most recent one is Deborah. And people ask me fairly often how I go about choosing one of these studies, and honestly, it's more that they choose me. And with this one, I would say it got started because every year in intro to Old Testament, I wind up teaching an introduction to Joshua and judges in the settlement period of Israel. And I'm an archaeologist, so the iron one era is of deep interest to me. And if your people want to dig up my technical stuff, they'll find all sorts of interesting things on an economic read on the book of Deuteronomy. So I'm all in, in teaching that material. But when we get to the book of judges in particular, what I find is that my students are stunned at how stupid and how corrupt the people of God can actually be. And as you know, the book of judges is a cycle of twelve stories, twelve hero stories about twelve unlikely leaders, hence my title. And as we go through the book of judges, we find that Israel continues to repeat the same cycle, which is, they start off great. They've been under the leadership of Joshua or Othniel or Ehud, or one of these leading judges in the beginning of the settlement era, and they're doing great and they're keeping the covenant and they're obeying God, and life is going well, and they're claiming territory and the promised land and all the promises are happening. And then they start slipping away from keeping the covenant, and they start forgetting the mighty acts of God, and they start forgetting the covenant requirements. And as they start forgetting and slipping away, the line that keeps reappearing in the book of judges is they followed after other gods, Elohim Acharim in Hebrew. And as they begin following after other gods, they start losing territory and life gets really yucky and they can't figure out why. And as was promised in the mosaic covenant, all of a sudden they find themselves oppressed by foreign powers, and life gets really hard, really fast. And finally they wake up one morning and they say, oh my gosh, this is what it says in the covenant. If we disobey, we're going to wind up oppressed by foreign powers. Hey, let's cry out to God, let's repent, let's recognize our sin. And they do it. And then we hit the next part of the cycle, which is God sends them a judge. The judge steps in, musters the troops, because at this point we've got a volunteer army. Everybody comes together, they fight off the Amalekites, the Moabites, the Midianites, whoever it is, is oppressing them. And woohoo, we live in a time of joy and productivity for a season. And then we repeat it again and again and again.

00:12:17 - James Early

Yeah, I know exactly what you're talking about. Well, and it goes on past judges too. In the times of the kings, depending on whichever way the king goes, the people go. Sort of. Sometimes we do that ourselves today a little bit.

00:12:32 - Sandy Richter

Well, and that. That's exactly what captures my students. We'll go through these twelve cycles and they'll be like, how stupid can the people of God be? And then we're like, hey, take a look in the mirror. How stupid can the people of God be? And as you know, that cycle, that twelve character cycle, not only repeats with this forward momentum, but it repeats with a downward momentum, too. So that by the time we get to the end of the book of judges and that horrible narrative about the Levite and his concubine, we come to realize that the people of God are worse than the Canaanites and that their moral code has become more compromised than the Canaanites, and their adherence to the stipulations of the covenant are a far cry from even the moral code of the Canaanites. And what you had asked me originally is, how did the story of Deborah capture me?

00:13:34 - James Early

Yeah.

00:13:35 - Sandy Richter

Well, she stands out in the middle of that very dark chapter of Israel's life as a woman of profound integrity, this innate stature of leadership. And for 40 years, she keeps the people of Israel from following that cycle. And as you know, she has this amazing victory over the valley of Jezreel. So she captured my attention and we decided to do a study on it.

00:14:07 - James Early

That's awesome. Can you give in a non-academic short version of the story of Deborah? Well, as I said to my daughter, who just got her PhD, tell me, like, I'm a third grader. And she did it.

00:14:23 - Sandy Richter

Yeah, we call it the elevator pitch. Yeah, yeah.

00:14:27 - James Early

Give me the elevator pitch of Deborah's story. The reason I ask this is I put out on social media. Hey, do you have any questions about Deborah? I'm interviewing Sandra Richter. One guy said, oh, I've read several of her books, but he didn't have any questions about Deborah. I talked to my daughter, who is really big on women leaders, and she. Well, I read the story once, so nobody sent me any questions. And so.

00:14:54 - Sandy Richter

Wow.

00:14:55 - James Early

Part of my question is, why don't we talk about Deborah Moore? Why isn't she mentioned more? Why is she overlooked?

00:15:02 - Sandy Richter

Or.

00:15:02 - James Early

Anyway, I'm so grateful you're doing all this.

00:15:04 - Sandy Richter

But, yeah, why is she in the background?

00:15:07 - James Early

Yeah.

00:15:08 - Sandy Richter

Yeah. I think number one is because very few people spend time in the book of judges. And one of the reason they don't spend time is it's a very dark book. It is. It's a very dark book. It's all about Israel's in between space between being a settled community under Moses and then being a settled community under the monarchy. It's a confusing period. It's a dark period. It's what I call in the curriculum the wild west of Israel's settlement period. Yeah. Yeah. You think about the OK corral. Like, we still have not decided as historians who were the good guys and who were the bad guys in the fight of the ok corral, because the good guys and the bad guys are only two inches apart during the Wild west. And that's true of the book of judges as well. I mean, Samson, this is our hero, you know?

00:16:02 - James Early

Right, right.

00:16:03 - Sandy Richter

Okay. So that's one reason people don't spend time in the book of judges. I think one of the other reasons is they do not realize how profoundly counter cultural Deborah's leadership was. So we'll talk about that for a minute. And for your daughter, who's real big on women and leadership, Israel is a patriarchal, patrilineal, patrilocal society. They are a traditional tribal society. Women do not lead according to their cultural norms. Now, their cultural norms have not been canonized by the Almighty. They just are their cultural norms. And so for a woman to step forward into that position is a big wake up call. Like, oh, my gosh, the Holy Spirit has chosen her. The Holy Spirit has gifted her. And this woman can stand her own in the middle of 40 years of middle eastern men in each other's faces, at each other's throats, arguing over water rights and livestock and everything else that, you know, early settlers do. So I think that's another reason she might not get much attention. But you asked for the elevator pitch. Who is Deborah? Well, she. We don't hear a lot about her general story. Kind of like the prophet Jonah. We know

that Jonah was a prophet for decades in the northern kingdom. But we've only got one story, right? And we've only got that one story because it's such an amazing story. Right? And Jonah turns redemptive history with his willingness to evangelize his enemy. Right. Deborah also, we know that she rules for a full generation, 40 years. That means she had to start pretty young. And that by the time she's done, she's got her crown of glory, meaning that gray hair has come in, and she's the Margaret Thatcher, the Ruth Bader Ginsburg of Israel's world. But she's got one story. And that one story is this profoundly important battle for the Jezreel valley. And most of your listeners are like, Jezreel Valley? What is that?

00:18:28 - James Early

Exactly.

00:18:29 - Sandy Richter

They probably know it as the valley of Armageddon. And it is the most important, the most important agricultural territory in all of the promised land. And it is the most important east west pass in the entire Afro-Asian continent. You cannot get from Mesopotamia to Egypt without passing through the Jezreel valley.

00:18:59 - James Early

So topographically, it's a crucial space.

00:19:04 - Sandy Richter

Yes.

00:19:05 - James Early

It's not just, this is the land we want.

00:19:07 - Sandy Richter

Yes.

00:19:08 - James Early

Whoever has that land has the power.

00:19:11 - Sandy Richter

Yes. And they have the cash register as well, because every caravan is going to. Every caravan in every army, if they want to go the easy way, is going to have to pass the Jezreel. It's where the via Mars passes. It is. It's. Yeah. If you're on the east coast, it's 90, it's 95. If you're on the west coast, it's the 101. You can't get from here to there without going through the Jezreel. So the Jezreel was promised to Israel. It should belong to Issachar, Zebulun, and Asher. They should

each have a section of the Jezreel which divvies up the wealth. Right. It divvies up the agricultural land. It divvies up a section of the highway. But what has happened by the time Deborah comes to power is that Jabin, the Canaanite, with the assistance of his warlord Sisera, has not only claimed the Jezreel so that Israel doesn't have control of their promised land, but they are also forcing Israelites into slave labor in the Jezreel valley. And when you do the socioeconomic background, it's Egypt who they're paying off. So there is tons of money passing through the hands of Jabin Sisera and into the Egyptian empire. And our team, who should possess that territory, is instead the slave labor on that territory. And when we think about the great story of redemption and this story that you ask on your podcast all the time, what does that mean for me? Well, this is one of those paradigm stories. This is a story that matters because it's a story about when the people of God do their disobedience to the covenant, have yielded the very territory that should belong to the kingdom and are now being enslaved by their own acts of disobedience. That matters.

00:21:16 - James Early

Boy, that applies to probably every era of the religious pilgrimage that we've all been on for thousands of years.

00:21:26 - Sandy Richter

Yes, it does.

00:21:27 - James Early

Yeah. Wow.

00:21:29 - Sandy Richter

So what I wind up asking throughout the curriculum, three core questions that one of my editors at HarperCollins was in the filming she's like that one. That one. We're going to ask that every time. And here are the three questions. What territory can you see from where you're standing that, you know, belongs to the kingdom of God, but for whatever reason, is not yet in the hands of the people of God? That's question one. Question two, is that territory worth fighting for? And question three is, what are you going to do about it?

00:22:06 - James Early

Whoa. That brings it right down to us, doesn't it?

00:22:08 - Sandy Richter

Yeah, it does.

00:22:10 - James Early

We like to read stories about other people, what they've done or not done, but when we look in the mirror, it really is, what am I doing to claim territory to bear witness to the kingdom of heaven? Right here?

00:22:26 - Sandy Richter

Yeah, right here, right now.

00:22:28 - James Early

Wow. Yeah, exactly. I talk about that a lot on my podcast. Because Jesus said, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The kingdom of God is within us. I don't think we've really. We haven't plumbed that to the depths yet. Yeah, yeah. I think Jesus, well, he also said, you know, I came to bear witness to the truth. I think he could see the kingdom of God even though you can't see with your material eyes, obviously. I think he could see it here now, spiritually. And I want to see what he saw. You know, it changes the way you treat people. It changes the way you interact with your enemies. For example, when you're trying to work for the kingdom, or in the kingdom, however you want to put it, you know, it. It's a lens, I think, that we look through.

00:23:16 - Sandy Richter

Yeah.

00:23:17 - James Early

It changes what you see, changes how you see people, how much you love them, that sort of thing.

00:23:22 - Sandy Richter

Well, when that grand question is being asked, which is where is your one allegiance and what are you trying to do with your life? Are you trying to build your kingdom or are you trying to build his kingdom?

00:23:36 - James Early

Right.

00:23:37 - Sandy Richter

I think that is the great dividing line of every ministry, every Christian, every church, every denomination, you name it. Whose kingdom are you building?

00:23:51 - James Early

I think that's so important. I don't remember which book it was. I think Richard Roared said in the Lord's prayer, even if you're praying for God's will and God's kingdom to come, it implies

that you're letting go of your will and your kingdom. It sort of goes hand in hand. You can't sort of do both of them at the same time. God will build whatever you need. We've got to build. We've got to work on his kingdom.

00:24:16 - Sandy Richter

Yeah, yeah, we do. And so this great story of Deborah and Barak and the 10,000 men of Naphtali and JI. The most unlikely hero of all time, is a story about three very courageous people who are placed in positions of leadership to choose God's kingdom, regardless of the cost, regardless of the danger, and regardless of the pushback. It's a great story.

00:24:53 - James Early

Yeah, it is. Now, obviously, at the time of this victory that she had over the occupying army. Yes, she was seen as a hero. So was Bharat and JI. And we still think of it that way. But what's the bigger picture? Down through the lens of several thousand years, do we see something that maybe they didn't see at the time? Is there a bigger picture, how that fits into the grander scheme of things? You know, they were doing what they had to do in the moment, but it obviously is big part of a bigger narrative. Do you have any thoughts on what's that bigger, overarching story going on here?

00:25:39 - Sandy Richter

Right. Well, the biggest story, of course, is the story, the grand story of redemption. Right. And that God's ultimate goal is to get his people back into his place with full access to his presence. And that's one of my thesis statements in the book, the Epic of Eden, which launched the Bible study series. So the story of Deborah and Barak is one small chapter, but the small chapter is for them believing the promise that God is busy moving his people into the promised land. That's why we call it the promised land, because it was promised to them. Right?

00:26:20 - James Early

Right.

00:26:21 - Sandy Richter

So getting those people back into the promised land with access to the presence through the tabernacle and eventually the temple, means that the people of God are going to have to conquer territory that was promised to them. And this victory of the Jezreel is basically Deborah and Barak standing up and saying, no, we believe in the promises of the Almighty, and we're willing to put our money where our mouth is. We're willing to put our lives on the line to accomplish this. We believe that God is going to show up, defend his people, and assist us in conquering the territories promised to it. So when we take that message and we move it into the new covenant, which is where you and I stand, one of the things we'll do in the study is help individuals translate the military language of the Old Testament into the New Testament, where we no longer fight against flesh and blood, but against powers and principalities. When Paul

tells us to put on the helmet of salvation and the breastplate of righteousness and take the sword of the spirit. So as we move into the new covenant. Yeah, the new covenant. The people of God no longer conquer territory for the kingdom through military activity. Now they conquer territory for the kingdom through spiritual activity. And that activity is the activity, first, of being sanctified ourselves so that our lives look like we are citizens of another kingdom. Critical issue, and then actually exercising that faith and our evangelism of the other, our outreach to the marginalized, so that when we ask that question, what territory can we see from where we're standing that should belong to the kingdom of God? That might be the identity and mission of our own church, which is drifting, as do all churches and all denominations. And it is the task of the faithful in a revival to pull it back in and stay on task. You know, I'm thinking Luke Skywalker, you know, stay on. Stay on target, right? Or it could. It could be that inner city public library that desperately needs adult tutors for these kids who are coming from such challenging circumstances so they have the opportunity, opportunity to pull themselves up and out of the hood. And where is your church in that dynamic? It could be the mission field. It could be a thousand different scenarios.

00:29:17 - James Early

As you're speaking, Sandy, I'm realizing everybody's going to see different territory in the story of Deborah. They also saw the Jezreel Valley. But each of us sees what it is that God wants us to do. Somebody else might not see that need see that situation, because that's not what God has for them. Anyway, I just realized, as we respond to this call on our lives, as you said, it might be a library, it might be something that seems like it's secular on the surface, but you're still doing something that God is calling you to do to glorify him, so to build kingdom. Yeah, exactly. And so I love the way you've brought this story into the present day and how it relates to us. I want to touch on a couple of things in this story of Deborah, because, especially in light of what you said about her being a woman in a patriarchal society and everything. And by the way, for those of you listening, this story of Deborah is in judges chapter four and five. She says, I want you to go on this military mission. He says, well, I'll go if you go with me. And then she says, well, if I go with you, then you won't get credit for the victory. Then the credit will go to a woman. It almost sounds like she's trying to let the guy have his thing, but he valued her so much. I mean, I think that speaks to the kind of judge and prophet she had been. He values her so much, he said, no, I want you with me. Well, I think that's amazing in that kind of context, you know, sociologically, don't you?

00:31:01 - Sandy Richter

First of all, I think that passage gets mistranslated. It becomes an if then.

00:31:05 - James Early

Oh, okay.

00:31:06 - Sandy Richter

And whereas I would say that a better translation is, of course I will go with you, Barak, of course I will go with you. But you need to know that the ultimate glory for this victory is not going to be yours. And when we read that, we, of course think, oh, well, Deborah's going to get the credit for this victory. But that is not the case. It is JL, the most unlikely hero of all time, who winds up getting the credit for the situation. What type of credit? Like in Judges chapter five, we hear loud and clear, clear that Barak is a hero, right? That he stands against the enemy, that he leads 10,000 men into victory. 10,000 men who, by the way, all know they're going to die. Like when they say yes, they say yes to a battle plan that is absolutely impossible and they all know it. These folks are nothing. They are experienced military men. And for an army of volunteer mustang soldiers with homemade weapons to take a stand against a professional army with 900 chariots, they are all going down. This is Aragorn standing outside the black gate of Mordor. They do not have a snowball's chance. So what do they mean by this ultimate victory or this credit? What they mean is that in this warrior culture, as in many other warrior cultures, Beowulf is another good example. It is dealing the death blow that makes the champion famous. So that is why when David goes sprinting out onto the field with Goliath, after he hits him with the rock, he jumps on his chest, grabs his sword and cuts his head off. That's the death blow. And that's what makes David famous. What Deborah is saying, of course I'll go with you, Barak, but the death blow is not coming at your hand. It's not coming at Deborah's hand either. It's coming at the hand of a stay at home pastoralist housewife who acts against her husband's will and kills a warlord with the ancient equivalent of a cast iron frying pan. It is a crazy story and it's a story of profound courage.

00:33:41 - James Early
Right.

00:33:42 - Sandy Richter
So what is going on in that passage? That passage, someone like Tom Schreiner would tell us that, oh, look, Barak is a coward and Deborah has to step in. Well, if Barak is a coward, then the divinely inspired author of Judges chapter five is a liar. Because he tells us that Barak is full of courage and that he's a man worthy of profound honor.

00:34:07 - James Early
Right.

00:34:08 - Sandy Richter
Is Barak a coward for asking the prophet of the almighty to attend him in battle? Is Barak a coward for asking the prophet of the almighty to be in the war camp and to announce when it's time to charge?

00:34:27 - James Early
Well, if that is the case, that sounds like wisdom. Sounds like brilliance to me.

00:34:32 - Sandy Richter

Well, and let's take our lens, our bias against women, off for just a moment, and let's move these roles into another gendered context. When Joshua asks Moses to come with him to the battle of the Amalekites, recognizing that Moses is now aged and cannot fight on the battlefield. Right. So what does Moses do? He stands up on the hill, as every good commanding general should do anyway. We don't need the general dying in the fray.

00:35:08 - James Early

Right.

00:35:09 - Sandy Richter

Moses stands up on the hill. Aaron and her get a rock so that he can sit there and they hold his arms up. Why? So that the guys who were down in the bloody, chaotic, noisy, completely confused battle scene can look up onto the mountain on a regular basis and see that the prophet of the Almighty has still got his hands raised, which means that the almighty is still on our side, which means fight on, brave one. Fight on, because the battle is the Lord's. So when Barak asks the prophet to come with him, the reason it's unusual is not because Barak is empowered. It's unusual because women don't belong in war camps and everyone knows it, and women don't belong on battlefields and everyone knows it. And Barack is like, hey, ma'am, you're the prophet. And if I'm going to get 10,000 men to muster for an impossible battle, they have to see the face of the representative of the almighty. And if I'm going to know the right moment to charge, I've got to have you in my back pocket.

00:36:22 - James Early

Right.

00:36:22 - Sandy Richter

And Deborah says, of course, I'm on my way.

00:36:25 - James Early

Absolutely.

00:36:26 - Sandy Richter

Yeah.

00:36:27 - James Early

So what does Deborah say to the patriarchal society in a lot of the Christian world today that downplays or actually forbids women in leadership roles in the church?

00:36:41 - Sandy Richter

Well, we have this conversation a lot, and I'm a woman in leadership, so I have this conversation a lot.

00:36:48 - James Early

I'm glad. Yeah.

00:36:50 - Sandy Richter

Yeah. And I'm at this point an old woman, so very few people challenge me at this point, but when I was 22, oh, my gosh, it was a whole different gig. So speaking to all the 22 year old women out there and all the men out there who know 22 year old women. What this story tells us is that the Holy Spirit is the Lord of the church. And what do I mean by that? First Corinthians, chapter twelve. It is the Holy Spirit who distributes the gifts. He is the one who chooses who will lead, who will be prophet, who will be a teacher, who will have the gift of service. And when he chooses, our job as the church is to defer to his wisdom. So if he chooses someone who is Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, young or old, the church's job is to say, yes, sir. And our job is to recognize that gift, train that gifting, and deploy that gifting. Is it unusual in our world for a woman to become the CEO of a Fortune 500 company? Yes, it is unusual. Is it unusual in our world for a woman to be a senior pastor? Yes, it is unusual. Was it unusual for a woman to become a career judge and prophet and up on a battlefield in the Jezreel valley, in Israel's world? Way more unusual than it is in our world. So the fact that the holy spirit called her is this huge critique of not only their culture, but of ours. And it's the Holy Spirit shouting at the ancient world and the modern world I choose. And when I choose, stand down. And you either support and defer or deal with me. Yeah.

00:38:56 - James Early

I love that. There are so many more questions I would love to ask you, but I'm going to cut short some of those because we've got to wrap this up in about five minutes or so. Is there something that no one asks you about, Deborah, that you wish they would?

00:39:13 - Sandy Richter

Hmm. Two things. One is to recognize that her identity as judge and prophet is highly unusual. There's only one other judge who gets both titles, and that's the rock star, Samuel.

00:39:28 - James Early

Right.

00:39:28 - Sandy Richter

So if we're going to put her in a file folder, we don't put her in the female file folder. We put her in the Rockstar file folder. That would be one.

00:39:35 - James Early

Okay.

00:39:36 - Sandy Richter

The other one is because of my archaeological and anthropological interests. Okay. The military strategy of the battle of the Jezreel is so cool. It is fascinating what happens with chariots and what happens with the topography of the Jezreel and how the charge down off of Mount Tabor engaged the forces of Sisera. Okay, guys, this is cool. And I. That stuff I get to dive into in the study, I make people do maps, because you can't understand it without maps. I'd really like folks to get excited about those.

00:40:17 - James Early

Well, I had hoped to have a little more time to talk about your book. It's really more of a Bible study that you do with people together, like in a church setting or a small group or something, right?

00:40:28 - Sandy Richter

Yes. So when people order it, they're ordering a book. The book is a study guide, but in the inside cover is a streaming code, which is where my lectures are. And if your church or group is still a DVD group, you can order the DVD's separate as well. So there's my lectures and then there's a study guide that helps a group or an individual get through those lectures. So that's how it works.

00:40:57 - James Early

Okay, cool. I'll have a link for that. They can get that on Amazon, right?

00:41:01 - Sandy Richter

They can. They can get it on Amazon. They can get it@seedbed.com. they can get it at Harper Christian resources. Yeah. And James, I think if we send a little email to my publicist at HarperCollins, they'll get you some giveaway copies.

00:41:17 - James Early

Oh, that would be awesome. Yeah, we'll work that out. I'm going to jump in here and just let you know that I have talked to her publisher and they have offered a five free copies to my listeners. So if you'll stay tuned till the end of the episode, I'll explain how you can enter a contest to win one of those five copies for you or maybe for your church to do a Bible study on Deborah. Okay, let's get back to the rest of the interview. I want to honor you for just the heart and soul that you've put into this and everything you do, really, to bring the story of Deborah alive and make it relevant to us today. And I really love your overall approach of making people

in the Bible come alive. It's just, it helps us understand so much. I just really want to honor you for that.

00:42:08 - Sandy Richter

Thank you so much.

00:42:10 - James Early

Yeah, you're welcome. This has been such a delight, as well as an honor to get to know you a little bit and to hear the passion that you have for this, because it's a really important message.

00:42:21 - Sandy Richter

Thank you.

00:42:22 - James Early

Just one of many important messages you have, I think.

00:42:25 - Sandy Richter

Thank you.

00:42:26 - James Early

I always ask my guests three final questions.

00:42:29 - Sandy Richter

Okay.

00:42:30 - James Early

And before we do that, first, if somebody wants to be in touch with you, what's the best way for them to connect?

00:42:36 - Sandy Richter

Well, like social media or so first, I've got a public facing Facebook page. So for the folks in your audience who are over 30. Right. And there's a public facing Facebook page, they can find me at Sandra Richter. And that will give all the stuff I'm publishing my speaking engagements, all that falderal. So that's easy. I'm also on Instagram. I have an Amazon author page. I have a faculty page at Westmont College, and I am currently working with my brilliant teaching assistant who is a computer science major. Isn't that wonderful? Because like you and I are not computer science majors. And we've got a website brewing that should launch the month of September, which will give links to everything I've published.

00:43:34 - James Early

If you can get all that to me, that'd be great. Here are the three final questions. And this is just kind of quick fire. It's not lengthy discussion topics.

00:43:43 - Sandy Richter

Okay.

00:43:44 - James Early

If you could talk to any Bible character other than Jesus, who would it be and what would you ask them?

00:43:50 - Sandy Richter

David? David?

00:43:52 - James Early

Why? What would you ask David?

00:43:54 - Sandy Richter

Oh my gosh. I don't want to just ask him questions. I actually want to be one of his mighty men. I want to be part of his private guard, and I want to watch his rise to power. I want to see the young man who was impetuous and outrageously courageous, who gets disciplined with exile and finally winds up king. Yeah, so that one's easy.

00:44:30 - James Early

I love that. Okay, the second one is this. Is there any Bible character that you especially identify with?

00:44:38 - Sandy Richter

Well, in different eras, different characters, and maybe this is a. I don't have an easy story. Let's say it that way.

00:44:49 - James Early

Okay, well, just pick one.

00:44:51 - Sandy Richter

And so Joseph.

00:44:54 - James Early

Which Joseph?

00:44:55 - Sandy Richter

Joseph, as in. In Genesis, they meant it for evil, but God meant it for good. This calling that I have, this identity that I have, has been hard fought and hard won. And there have been many, many people and many, many organizations that would have been very happy to see me disappear. And God has been faithful over and over again. And every one of those moments when I was dismissed, pushed to the side, assaulted, they meant it for evil. God meant it for good. And here I am, so.

00:45:40 - James Early

Well, thank you for persevering.

00:45:42 - Sandy Richter

Thank you.

00:45:43 - James Early

The last question is the Bible speaks to you podcast. As I said, it's about getting back to the original message, the original Christianity of Jesus, how to think, pray, and love like he did. How would you describe Jesus's original message of how he wanted us to live our lives?

00:46:02 - Sandy Richter

Well, I think that goes back to that first question, and perhaps that was on our pre-recording time. Whose kingdom are you building? Whose kingdom are you building? Jesus entire life was crystal clear. He was not building a kingdom that protected, defended, or made his life comfortable. He was building the kingdom of God. And every step he took, every word he spoke, every challenge he chose, and every challenge he stepped away from were based on that ambition. How can I best embody thy kingdom come? And sometimes that meant he was making fools of Pharisees in the temple courts. Sometimes he was turning over tables, and sometimes he was being willing to sit with a Samaritan woman at a well and let the gossip rage wild. If we could clarify in our lives where our primary allegiance is, we, the church, would be changing the world.

00:47:15 - James Early

Well, let's challenge all of those listening right now to do exactly that. Let's invite and encourage everyone listening to take what Sandy just said, take it to heart, go back and play that part over again and listen to it again. Because each one of us can have a big impact for the kingdom. I'm sure of that.

00:47:36 - Sandy Richter

Amen. Unlikely heroes. That's what that curriculum is all about. Unlikely heroes.

00:47:41 - James Early

That's you and me.

00:47:42 - Sandy Richter

Yes, it is.

00:47:43 - James Early

That's everybody listening.

00:47:44 - Sandy Richter

Absolutely. And empowered by the Holy Spirit. The stuff we can do.

00:47:49 - James Early

Absolutely. No, you're right. We can't do it by ourselves. Absolutely. Sandy, I want to thank you so much. This has been such a delight. Yeah, thank you. This has just been fabulous.

00:47:59 - Sandy Richter

It's been great to be here. And I'll get those links to you.

00:48:03 - James Early

Great. Thank you so much.