



THE 12 APOSTLES BIBLE STUDY SERIES

Deborah

Introduction

Wise leaders are rare. They accomplish great amounts of work without direct involvement because they know how to work through other people. They are able to see the big picture that often escapes those directly involved, so they make good mediators, advisers, and planners. Deborah fit this description perfectly.

She had all these leadership skills, and she had a remarkable relationship with God. The insight and confidence God gave this woman placed her in a unique position in the Old Testament. Deborah is among the outstanding women of history.

Facts:

- Where: Canaan
- Occupations: Mother, Wife, Prophet, Judge, Poet

Outline

The Desperate Situation (Jdg 4:1-3)

Remarkable Women of faith (Jdg 4:4-7)

Hesitant Man (Jdg 4:8-9)

Divided Nation (Jdg 4:10)

God's Intervention (Jdg 4:11-14)

An Unexpected End (Jdg 4:17-24)

Final thoughts

Note: To improve readability, the Message version of the Bible is used.



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The Desperate Situation (Jdg 4:1-3)

Story (Judges 4)	Poem (Judges 5)
<p>Jdg 4:1-3 <i>The People of Israel kept right on doing evil in GOD's sight. With Ehud dead, (2) GOD sold them off to Jabin king of Canaan who ruled from Hazor [1]. Sisera, who lived in Harosheth Haggoyim, was the commander of his army. (3) The People of Israel cried out to GOD because he had cruelly oppressed them with his nine hundred iron chariots for twenty years.</i></p>	<p>Jdg 5:6-12 <i>In the time of Shamgar son of Anath, and in the time of Jael, Public roads were abandoned, travelers went by backroads. (7) Warriors became fat and sloppy, no fight left in them. Then you, Deborah, rose up; you got up, a mother in Israel. (8) God chose new leaders, who then fought at the gates. And not a shield or spear to be seen among the forty companies of Israel. (9) Lift your hearts high, O Israel, with abandon, volunteering yourselves with the people—bless GOD! (10) You who ride on prize donkeys comfortably mounted on blankets And you who walk down the roads, ponder, attend! (11) Gather at the town well and listen to them sing, Chanting the tale of GOD's victories, his victories accomplished in Israel. Then the people of GOD went down to the city gates. (12) Wake up, wake up, Deborah! Wake up, wake up, sing a song! On your feet, Barak! Take your prisoners, son of Abinoam!</i></p>

Note [1] Hazor—a city which Joshua had captured and burned (Jos_11:10-13). Because of the lethargy of Naphtali (Jdg_1:33, Jdg 5:6-8) the Canaanites seem to have been allowed to resettle and build a new city there.

Quiz

1. What is the situation? What do Jdg 5:6-8 tell us about what would happen to us when we marginalize God?
2. What did the Israelites do? (Jdg 4:3)
3. God has chosen new leaders according to Judges 5:8, who are they (see Jdg 5:12)?

Applications:

1. What have you learnt about the danger of lethargy (or laziness) (see footnote [1])? Its root cause?
2. Can you share with the group about a time when you suffered defeats due to procrastination?
3. In what ways have leaders and helpers that God has risen up to help you and inspire you?

The society of that day was strongly masculine, so it was humiliating when women had leadership in the land (Isa. 3:12). In the next division, it records a godly woman Deborah who knew God's will, rallied God's people, and won God's victories; and we are grateful for her story.



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Remarkable Women of faith (Jdg 4:4-7)

Story (Judges 4)	Poem (Judges 5)
<i>Jdg 4:4-7 Deborah was a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth. She was judge over Israel at that time. (5) She held court under Deborah's Palm between Ramah and Bethel in the hills of Ephraim. The People of Israel went to her in matters of justice. (6) She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "It has become clear that GOD, the God of Israel, commands you: Go to Mount Tabor and prepare for battle. Take ten companies of soldiers from Naphtali and Zebulun. (7) I'll take care of getting Sisera, the leader of Jabin's army, to the Kishon River with all his chariots and troops. And I'll make sure you win the battle."</i>	<i>Jdg 5:7 Warriors became fat and sloppy, no fight left in them. Then you, Deborah, rose up; you got up, a mother in Israel.</i>

Quiz

1. What does the term “a mother of Israel” in Jdg 5:7 tell you about the primary role of Deborah in her life? What other roles did God also give her to do? (See Jdg 4:4-7, Jdg 5)
2. What gifts did God give Deborah to discharge her duties? (Jdg 4:4-5, Jdg 5)
3. Did she serve according to her own wits or not? Please explain. (see Jdg 4:6)

Applications

1. What ministerial (and/or other) work has God called you to do? If none, why?
2. How has God equipped you to serve Him?
3. Where and how do you get your source of encouragement and direction?

One person's faith and obedience can make a difference in history. Whether you are a leader like Deborah or a follower like Barak, be sure to be a believer, because faith makes the difference between defeat and victory.



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Hesitant Man (Judges 4:8-9)

Story (Judges 4)	Poem (Judges 5)
<p><i>Jdg 4:8-9 Barak said, "If you go with me, I'll go. But if you don't go with me, I won't go." (9) She said, "Of course I'll go with you. But understand that with an attitude like that, there'll be no glory in it for you. GOD will use a woman's hand to take care of Sisera." Deborah got ready and went with Barak to Kedesh.</i></p> <p><i>Jdg 4:22 Barak arrived in pursuit of Sisera. Jael went out to greet him. She said, "Come, I'll show you the man you're looking for." He went with her and there he was—Sisera, stretched out, dead, with a tent peg through his neck.</i></p>	<p><i>Jdg 5:4-5 GOD, when you left Seir, marched across the fields of Edom, Earth quaked, yes, the skies poured rain, oh, the clouds made rivers. (5) Mountains leapt before GOD, the Sinai God, before GOD, the God of Israel.</i></p> <p><i>Jdg 5:20-21 The stars in the sky joined the fight, from their courses they fought against Sisera. (21) The torrent Kishon swept them away, the torrent attacked them, the torrent Kishon. Oh, you'll stomp on the necks of the strong!</i></p>

Quiz

1. From the last session, what commands and promises did Barak receive from God through Prophet Deborah? (Jdg 4:6-7)?
2. What character flaw do you see in Barak? (Jdg 4:8-9)

Applications

1. Recall a time when you bargain with God against a clear promise of God? How has that impacted you?
2. What have learnt from Barak? What do you do to avoid making the same mistake?

In Hebrews 11:32, Barak is named as a man of faith, but Deborah enlisted him and saved the day. What a strange victory! God used two women, a jug of milk, a hammer, a tent peg, and a storm to defeat the enemy! (See 1 Cor. 1:26-29.)



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Divided Nation (Judges 4:10)

Story (Judges 4)	Poem (Judges 5)
<p><i>Jdg 4:10 There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men went up under his command. Deborah also went up with him.</i></p>	<p><i>Jdg 5:13-18 Then the remnant went down to greet the brave ones. The people of GOD joined the mighty ones. (14) The captains from Ephraim came to the valley, behind you, Benjamin, with your troops. Captains marched down from Makir, from Zebulun high-ranking leaders came down. (15) Issachar's princes rallied to Deborah, Issachar stood fast with Barak, backing him up on the field of battle. But in Reuben's divisions there was much second-guessing. (16) Why all those campfire discussions? Diverted and distracted, Reuben's divisions couldn't make up their minds. (17) Gilead played it safe across the Jordan, and Dan, why did he go off sailing? Asher kept his distance on the seacoast, safe and secure in his harbors. (18) But Zebulun risked life and limb, defied death, as did Naphtali on the battle heights.</i></p>

Quiz

1. In what ways do you see divisions within the nation? (Jdg 5:13-18)?
2. What do learn from Zebulun as a warrior of God? (Jdg 5:18)

Applications

1. The scriptures call the church to unite in pursuit of God cause. What are the stumbling blocks?
2. How have you decided to be like Zebulun to fight alongside God's people?

Don't let others discourage you. Not all the tribes responded with faith and courage; in fact some refused to get involved in the battle. Some sacrificed their lives while others stayed home. It is a fact of the life.



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God's Intervention (Judges 4:11-14)

Story (Judges 4)	Poem (Judges 5)
<p><i>Jdg 4:11-14 It happened that Heber the Kenite had parted company with the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' in-law. He was now living at Zaananim Oak near Kedesh. (12) They told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor. (13) Sisera immediately called up all his chariots to the Kishon River—nine hundred iron chariots!—along with all his troops who were with him at Harosheth Haggoyim. (14) Deborah said to Barak, "Charge! This very day GOD has given you victory over Sisera. Isn't GOD marching before you?" Barak charged down the slopes of Mount Tabor, his ten companies following him.</i></p>	<p><i>Jdg 5:19-23 The kings came, they fought, the kings of Canaan fought. At Taanach they fought, at Megiddo's brook, but they took no silver, no plunder. (20) The stars in the sky joined the fight, from their courses they fought against Sisera. (21) The torrent Kishon swept them away, the torrent attacked them, the torrent Kishon. Oh, you'll stomp on the necks of the strong! (22) Then the hoofs of the horses pounded, charging, stampeding stallions. (23) "Curse Meroz," says GOD's angel. "Curse, double curse, its people, Because they didn't come when GOD needed them, didn't rally to GOD's side with valiant fighters."</i></p>

Quiz

1. How is the military might of Israel compared with its enemy? (Jdg 4:11-14)
2. What does Jdg 4:14 demonstrate about the importance of the Word of God?
3. "They" in Jdg 5:19-23 referred to Zebulun and Naphtali. How did they fight?

Applications

1. Share with the group situations in which you find yourself being an underdog or face difficulties?
2. How have your reliance on God's Word helped you overcome such difficulties?
3. How does the truth "God is fighting for us" affect your way of fighting spiritual battles?

The battle was entirely the Lord's. To use frail, weak, easily smashed clay pots to carry the light of the gospel into the world is an essential ingredient of the divine strategy. Sometimes we find that hard to accept, especially in our world that is devoted to power and success, impressiveness and influence. It runs counter to all that our materialistic culture holds dear. That is why it is so much needed—to challenge the culture's presuppositions and expose its false values, from the perspective of eternity.



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An Unexpected End (Jdg_4:17-24)

<p><i>Jdg 4:17-24</i> Meanwhile Sisera, running for his life, headed for the tent of Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite. Jabin king of Hazor and Heber the Kenite were on good terms with one another. [1] (18) Jael stepped out to meet Sisera and said, "Come in, sir. Stay here with me. Don't be afraid." So he went with her into her tent. She covered him with a blanket. (19) He said to her, "Please, a little water. I'm thirsty." She opened a bottle of milk, gave him a drink, and then covered him up again. (20) He then said, "Stand at the tent flap. If anyone comes by and asks you, 'Is there anyone here?' tell him, 'No, not a soul.'" (21) Then while he was fast asleep from exhaustion, Jael wife of Heber took a tent peg and hammer, tiptoed toward him, and drove the tent peg through his temple and all the way into the ground. He convulsed and died. (22) Barak arrived in pursuit of Sisera. Jael went out to greet him. She said, "Come, I'll show you the man you're looking for." He went with her and there he was—Sisera, stretched out, dead, with a tent peg through his neck. (23) On that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the People of Israel. (24) The People of Israel pressed harder and harder on Jabin king of Canaan until there was nothing left of him.</p>	<p><i>Jdg 5:23-24</i> "Curse Meroz," says GOD's angel. "Curse, double curse, its people, Because they didn't come when GOD needed them, didn't rally to GOD's side with valiant fighters." (24) Most blessed of all women is Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite, most blessed of homemaking women.</p>
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Note [1] Verse Jdg_4:11 has prepared us for the fact that the descendants of Hobab, Moses' father-in-law, in which line Heber stood, had already separated themselves out from Israel again and thereby enjoyed much more favorable relations with Jabin (Jdg_4:17).

Quiz

1. What was Sisera's fate? (Jdg 4:17-24)
2. Meroz were Israelites who should have been identified with God's cause, but had failed to do so due to lethargy. What is their ending? (Jdg 5:23)
3. Jael is a Kenite but she is called the "most blessed of all woman". What has she done? (Jdg 5:24)

Applications

1. Share with the group a time when God blessed you unexpectedly.
2. In what ways have you identified yourself with God's cause? If not, why not?
3. Recall a when you did participate in God's cause, how has God blessed you?

Sisera's story sharpens our sense of human vulnerability, of the uncertainty of this short and transitory life. That is a message which the present generation badly needs to hear, as we do everything in our power to distance death and pretend it does not happen. So the wisdom is to fear God and to rejoice in doing His will. Deborah demonstrates what a person can accomplish because God is in control.



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Final thoughts

But the focus of rejoicing is the Lord, Yahweh the God of Israel.

It begins and ends with God.

He is to be praised because it was His word and power that moved the otherwise ineffective leaders of the people to fulfill their role and the people to follow them.



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Study Guide - Deborah

The Desperate Situation (Judges 4:1-3)

Application 1: The root cause is the idolatry of comfort or pleasure, and, sometimes, fear of failure and escapism. She encourages us to spend our efforts on what we can do rather than on worrying about what we can't do. True security comes from the Lord.

Application 3: The idolatry of comfort or pleasure must be overcome by the joy of holy ambition.

Remarkable Women of faith (Judges 4:4-7)

Quiz 1. She didn't deny or resist her position in the culture as a woman and wife, but she never allowed herself to be hindered by it either.

Quiz 2. She was a channel of divine revelation, the special leader raised up by God for this time. As with every true spiritual gift, this was recognized, not because she wore a badge, or carried a diploma or even announced herself as possessing it, but just because people were so consistently and regularly helped by her ministry.

Application 3. Lack of ability or knowledge or time or busy or too stressed or too tired are no excuse for not serving God (see Quiz 2). She reminds us of the need to be available both to God and to others.

Hesitant Man (Jdg 4:8-9)

Quiz 1. To Barak came both the divine command and the divine strategy, and with them, perhaps most importantly of all, the divine promise, "I will deliver [Sisera] into your hand." Obedience is therefore, as always, the product of faith.

Quiz 2. The real flaw in Barak's character is shown in the fact that having received God's call through Deborah, he tried to make his obedience conditional (Jdg_4:8). Whenever we start to bargain with God about the clear terms of His Word which demand our obedience, we are bound to be wrong-footed.

Application 1. Example: you doubt God's goodness when something happens to you. Meanwhile God has promise to protect you and help you in time of trouble. He is always with you and do good for you.

Result: It robs you of peace and joy.



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Divided Nation (Jdg 4:10)

Application 2: Unity in love is what allows the invisible God to be made known on earth. 1Jn 4:12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

God's Intervention (Jdg 4:11-14)

Application 2. Note the importance of the divine Word again as His people go forward into the fight. We cannot expect to be strong if we are not nurtured on the Word of God.

Application 3. Yet the outcome, which is the climax of an initiative which is truly God's from beginning to end, is far beyond anything that His people could ever have imagined.

An Unexpected End (Jdg 4:17-24)

Quiz 2 Meroz lethargy condemned them and their city is never heard of again and has never been located.

Quiz 3 But Jael, who was not a true Israelite, was the agent of the Lord's vengeance on the tyrant oppressor, and for that reason her action is praised, even though we may not approve of the method.