

Week 6- Deborah

Connect: choose 1 *Connect* question and discuss for 5-7 minutes.

- When have you been surprised by someone's vocation or job? Someone doing something you wouldn't expect?
- Share one time when someone being physically present with you encouraged you.

Read these passages aloud: Judges 4-5:3, 5:6-9, 31

Engage the text as a group:

1. What do you **observe**?

- Look at 4:1. Look back at 3:12; 3:7; and 2:11—what's the common theme?
- Who are the people that are named? What are their roles?
- What is Deborah's role? Barak's role? Sisera and Jabin?

2. What **questions** do you have of the text?

- Why did the people keep failing?
- Who was Barak? Where did he come from?

Why does Deborah matter?

The book of Judges tells of Israel's history before they had a king. God commanded Israel to clear the land of the Canaanite people and their worship practices. Instead, the Israelites disobeyed, attached themselves to the Canaanite people, and took on worship and living practices that were abhorrent to the LORD. A recurring refrain in Judges is that the people "did what was right in their own eyes," neglecting God's commands and worshipping other gods. God would often then use oppressive neighboring nations to rule over them as God's judgment on them. Then, the people would cry out to God, God would have mercy on them and raise up another judge to lead them and restore peace. But when the judge died, the people fell away again. This happens so often in Judges that one pastor calls this "the stupid cycle."¹ Because of this, God's faithfulness emerges as an important theme of the book.

The story of Deborah matters because she was a judge appointed by God to lead and guide the people of Israel into ways of righteousness. Judges were regional leaders who arbitrated cases between people, helped the people follow God, and occasionally fought battles against their enemies. This is what Deborah did. She was a leader charged with helping the people keep their covenant with the LORD their God by being faithful to the LORD's commandments. She's unique in that she's the only recorded female judge, but this is not pointed out as an anomaly in the text. She is also the only judge who is also referred to as a prophet—she speaks on behalf of the Lord. Deborah gives us a great example of what a judge was supposed to do.

Under Deborah's leadership, Barak leads Israel into a military victory that restores peace to the land of Israel for 40 years. So, for 40 years Israel kept the LORD's commandments before falling away again.

¹ Pastor Darrell Delaney, Madison Church.

Put this bible story in one sentence:

"In this story, God_____."

How does Deborah point us to Jesus?

Deborah was a judge for a time over Israel; Jesus is the judge of Israel and all people, even while he is king, priest, and prophet. Deborah led Israel into a military victory to free them from oppression under the Canaanites. She mediated the LORD's judgment on the people, passing on to them the word of the LORD, revealing the LORD's will for the people of Israel.

In Jesus Christ, we not only receive what God has to say to God's people, but we receive *God himself*. *Jesus is God—we get to receive God* in Jesus Christ. Jesus is both the mediator of the word of the LORD and the very Word of God become a human person. The peace and rest that Jesus leads his people into isn't a temporary one, contingent upon our behaving well. God knows we will fail—so Jesus came. Jesus never fell away from the Father, but he took on the judgment that should be ours for our falling away. In Jesus Christ, we receive the Holy Spirit of God who keeps us in perfect peace, teaches us rest in God, and heals us and our communities and societies from the ways sin has caused brokenness.

So Now What?

- Where do we see "the stupid cycle" in our own lives (or campus, dorm, church, etc)?
- Where do we see God's faithfulness despite our stupidity?
- When has God called you to something (like Barak) and you were scared to do it solo?
- Who has been a Deborah in your life--someone who called you out, called you into the thing you're supposed to do, and gave you courage by their presence and encouragement?
- How can we look for God differently because we know this story?

Video:

For set-up of book of Judges and the context that Deborah arises in, watch *The Bible Project's*, "Read Scripture: Judges":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOYy8iCfIJ4>

Closing Prayer

Thank you God, that you are a God who uses our failures even to further your purposes. Nothing is wasted. Teach us by your Spirit to follow you, especially in wilderness places, especially when we are confused. Bring us back by your Spirit to your way of peace, your truth, your love that we may live lives of flourishing that witness to our neighbor of who you are—loving and faithful and a just God. Through Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

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