

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 story of Deborah matters because she was a judge appointed by God to lead and guide the people of Israel into ways of righteousness. She was a leader charged with helping the people keep their covenant with the LORD their God to be faithful to the LORD's commandments. She's unique in that she's the only recorded female judge, but this also, is not pointed out as an anomaly even in the text.¹ 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.

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. 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.

¹ This is remarkable because ancient Israel was an androcentric (male-centered) society with patriarchal structures.

3. What **applications** might this passage have on our lives today?
- When in life have you cried out to God in desperation??
 - Who has been a Deborah in your life? Someone who called you out, called you into the thing you're supposed to do, gave you courage by their presence and encouragement?

6 tools for interpretation: read through the 6 Tools (if time allows) or take-home and read.

Literary: theological history; Judges records the life of the people of Israel in the land God led them to with Joshua as their leader (after Moses).²

Historical: Judges tells of Israel's history, when they did what was right in their own eyes; neglected God's commands, worshipped other gods, and made disasters of everything. God commanded Israel to clear out the land of the Canaanite people and their worship practices. Instead, the Israelites disobeyed, attached themselves to the Canaanite people, and took on their worship and immoral practices that were abhorrent to the LORD. Oppressive neighboring nations rule over them as God's judgment on them.

The people cry out to God; God has mercy and raises up a judge to lead them and restore peace; but when the judge dies, the people fall away again = "the stupid cycle."³ Thus, God's faithfulness emerges as an important theme of the book.⁴

Deborah = a prophet and judge, appointed by God to lead the land and people into peace and deliverance.

Theological: The LORD uses Deborah and Barak to lead Israel out of the oppressive rule of Canaan, showing the LORD's faithfulness. After this, peace and rest is restored to the land for a time.

Cultural: Prophets and judges acted as leaders, counsel, advisors to the people of Israel. Deborah was a judge and prophet, accepted and respected by her people,⁵ yet it would have been uncommon and so perhaps remarkable that a woman was in the role of a judge. Yet, Deborah's role is not questioned—it is simply assumed, indicating her stature among the people.

The bigger story: The book of Judges tells of the time in Israel's history when they dwelled in the promised land God promised them, but in sin.⁶ The book of Judges tells particularly harrowing accounts of the way sin destroys human life and bodies, bringing destruction and death. But, it also points to a different way—living by God's commands given for our flourishing.

² "Judges," <https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-judges/>.

³ Judges 2:16-23; cf Pastor Darrell Delaney, Madison Church.

⁴ "Judges," biblica.com.

⁵ Judges 4:5 – she "sat under the palm of Deborah...the Israelites came up to her for judgment."

⁶ "Judges," <https://www.biblica.com/resources/scholar-notes/niv-study-bible/intro-to-judges/>.

Holy Spirit: the conviction of the Spirit brought by judgment on Israel brought the people back to the LORD whenever they strayed, including through Deborah’s ministry.

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.