



Scriptures: Judges 4; Hebrews 11:32

Main Ideas: 1. Deborah was the only judge in Judges who was a judge that judged. 2. The Bible isn't sexist.

[This series is designed to be used in any order, and the intro is the same during each week with a focus of the importance of reading the Old Testament as a whole each week, if you prefer, you could do this just during the first lesson, or stretch this into its own lesson depending on the amount of time you typically have for teaching.]

Intro:

Hey students, welcome to our series called “Old People.” This is not a teaching series about your grandparents, but a series about people from the Old Testament, and how those people – who would make your grandparents look young – were used by God to change the world, often despite themselves. We’re going to take an in depth look during this series into four different “Old People”: Deborah, Joseph, Esther, and Sampson, getting familiar with their stories, and what we can learn from them and apply to our own lives as young people.

Let’s pray before we get into it! [Pray.]

We’re going to be digging deep into the lives of these individuals, and all of their messy situations, but before we do that, let’s talk about why it is important for Christians today to study the Old Testament.

[I recommend going over this list each week and maybe removing some words or descriptions from the included Old Testament recap slide, and asking students to help you recap these points, but you can briefly touch on them with the descriptions below each week if time allows. The idea is that students learn the importance of reading the Old Testament through this repetition each week of the series.]

In the Old Testament, we can find out about God’s original plan for creation (and His plan for redeeming it) in the Pentateuch, a fancy name for the first five books of the Bible. Can anyone name those?

[Wait for answers – throw out some candy – or substitute high praise if your church doesn't give you a spending account.]

The story of God's people continues through the narrative history of the books of Joshua through 2 Chronicles where we can see the Israelites progress from a nation without a home to a nation without a home.

The book of Lamentations contains crying out to God where we can learn a lot about how to express ourselves by reading this book and how God is faithful to us even in difficulty.

The book of Psalms contains a number of songs to God that focus on the importance of worship through every type of situation, and we can learn a lot about God's character through what is said of Him by the songwriters.

Wisdom literature, which includes books like Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and song of Solomon, is a collection of wise sayings and reflections on the meaning of life which is important stuff.

In the prophetic literature we can see Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection all foretold, along with insight into Israel's future and much about the end times. They teach us about God's character as well.

Finally, in some of the "misfit" books of the Old Testament, we can see topics of suffering and loss in the book of Job, and a great story about how God can use us despite our best efforts to disobey Him and be whiny complainers with bad attitudes.

This is all super applicable, so without further ado, let's get into tonight's story:

Main Point: Deborah was the only judge in the book of Judges who was a judge who judged and it shows us that the Bible isn't sexist.

Let's dive into a story that's got all the drama, courage, and epic vibes of a blockbuster movie. Deborah was one of the most powerful and fearless figures in the Old Testament. Picture this: she's the "Wonder Woman" of the Old Testament, with real boss lady vibes. So, buckle up, and let's explore why Deborah's life is more than just some ancient history, it's a seriously cool lesson in leadership, faith, and guts.

Meet Deborah: The OG Power Woman

First off, let's set the scene. The story took place in the land of Canaan, and things were looking pretty rough. The Israelites were stuck in a cycle of oppression and redemption, like they were on a never-ending hamster wheel of mess-up and make-up. The book of Judges tells us that things were so chaotic that everyone was basically doing their own thing without any real leadership.

But then, enter Deborah. She's introduced to us in Judges 4:4 as a prophetess and a judge. Now, hold up. What's a prophetess and a judge?

A prophetess was a woman who communicated God's messages to the people. Think of her as a divine messenger with a hotline to the Almighty.

A judge: This isn't like a courtroom judge but more like a leader and a peacemaker. Deborah's gig was to lead and settle disputes among the Israelites.

So, Deborah was the full package. She's had spiritual insight, leadership skills, and the ability to bring justice. Imagine her as the ultimate mentor, peacemaker, and superhero rolled into one. It's no wonder people flocked to her for advice.

But instead of hearing any more from me, let's get it straight from the source:

[At this time, read Judges chapter 4 in its entirety.]

Judges 4 (NIV)

4 Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, now that Ehud was dead. ² So the Lord sold them into the hands of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. Sisera, the commander of his army, was based in Harosheth Haggoyim. ³ Because he had nine hundred chariots fitted with iron and had cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years, they cried to the Lord for help.

⁴ Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading^l Israel at that time. ⁵ She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to

have their disputes decided. ⁶ She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, “The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: ‘Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. ⁷ I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.’”

⁸ Barak said to her, “If you go with me, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go.”

⁹ “Certainly I will go with you,” said Deborah. “But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.” So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. ¹⁰ There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men went up under his command. Deborah also went up with him.

¹¹ Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses’ brother-in-law, and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaanannim near Kedesh.

¹² When they told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, ¹³ Sisera summoned from Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River all his men and his nine hundred chariots fitted with iron.

¹⁴ Then Deborah said to Barak, “Go! This is the day the Lord has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the Lord gone ahead of you?” So Barak went down Mount Tabor, with ten thousand men following him. ¹⁵ At Barak’s advance, the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot.

¹⁶ Barak pursued the chariots and army as far as Harosheth Haggoyim, and all Sisera’s troops fell by the sword; not a man was left. ¹⁷ Sisera, meanwhile, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was an alliance between Jabin king of Hazor and the family of Heber the Kenite.

¹⁸ Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, “Come, my lord, come right in. Don’t be afraid.” So he entered her tent, and she covered him with a blanket.

¹⁹ “I’m thirsty,” he said. “Please give me some water.” She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up.

²⁰ “Stand in the doorway of the tent,” he told her. “If someone comes by and asks you, ‘Is anyone in there?’ say ‘No.’”

²¹ But Jael, Heber’s wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died.

²² Just then Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. “Come,” she said, “I will show you the man you’re looking for.” So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera with the tent peg through his temple—dead.

²³ On that day God subdued Jabin king of Canaan before the Israelites. ²⁴ And the hand of the Israelites pressed harder and harder against Jabin king of Canaan until they destroyed him.

Okay, so that was a lot! Let’s recap here for any of you who fell asleep... (fun fact, the Bible does the same thing), because Judges chapter 5 is basically a long song that retells the entire story of Deborah – essentially this story was so cool, that they turned it into a musical!

So, if you missed any of that, basically Israel had been messing up their lives and finally turned to God. God heard the Israelites and chose Deborah, the prophet and judge of Israel to help defeat Sisera who was basically their dictator at the time. Deborah asked Barak to help, and he essentially did the bare minimum required to overthrow a dictator, leaving most of the work for Deborah. Have you ever asked anyone to help you do something and ended up doing most of it?

[Allow time for maybe one or two stories here from students.]

Anyhow, in battle, the Israelites won because of Deborah’s presence as their “mascot,” they defeated Sisera and his army, but he actually dipped before the end of the battle and found his way to Jael’s tent, where he was offered milk and a nap. Nothing suspicious at all, right? During his nap, he got straight up deleted by Jael, who drove a tent peg through his brain and Israel lived happily ever two weeks later when they started to live in sin again.

Through this situation, Deborah didn't seek personal glory. Her role was crucial, but she was more focused on serving God and her people. This teaches us that making a difference doesn't always mean being in the spotlight; it's about making an impact where you are.

Deborah's life is like a script for an epic action movie, but with a powerful message that transcends time. Her story isn't just about ancient battles and historical events; it's about courage, leadership, and faith that can inspire us today.

So, the next time you face a tough situation or wonder if you can make a difference, remember Deborah. She showed us that with faith, courage, and a bit of divine intervention, you can overcome even the biggest challenges. You might not have chariots or armies, but you've got the same potential to be a leader, a brave soul, and a difference-maker.

This lesson could end here, but I want to take a few more minutes to look into one other concept that shows up a few times in this story: that of credit being given where credit is due.

In this story, Barak was told that because he didn't go into battle without Deborah, that the glory wouldn't go to him, and which it didn't. Remember the musical made about Deborah and Jael, the two boss ladies from the previous chapter that we just read?

This is all fine and good, but in the New Testament we see something very interesting that I want to draw your attention to.

Hebrews chapter 11 in the New Testament is often referred to as the faith hall of fame in the Bible because it highlights heroes of the faith from the Old Testament and their faithful deeds. This list is kind of like those banners that they hang up in school gyms with the names of players with their jersey numbers retired.

Let's read Hebrews 11:32 (NIV) and let me know if you see anything strange:

32 And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel...

Even though Judges credited Deborah as the one who saved Israel, the New Testament mentions Barak and not Deborah. Why is this? Is the Bible sexist? (Some people think this.)

Let's investigate this deeper, by first looking at the other names included in this list:

Gideon, he was afraid to do what God asked, had a lot of doubts about God's ability to use him and defeat the Philistines, and he led almost reluctantly.

Sampson was a violent man who made compromises in his own personal beliefs often and was an overall screw up who led with his biceps and left his brain at home.

Jephthah ended up sacrificing his own daughter to God which was NOT cool then or now.

David killed one of his best friends to cover up an affair with his wife. Enough said.

Samuel was a wise man, but ended up with 1,000 women in his life and as a result was an absent father whose own kids tried to kill him to take over the kingdom that he had also led into spiritual ruin.

So, this list seems more like a list of people that God used to do mighty deeds IN SPITE of themselves than because they lived upright lives. So, Deborah would not fit on that list because she was known as a wise, upright woman who was the protector of Israel.

A few more quick thoughts on this before we break for small groups...

Looking elsewhere in Hebrews 11 we see that Sarah, the wife of Abraham and Rahab, the great-great-grandmother of David listed, so this list in Hebrews cannot be accused of not including women. It makes more sense to see that in this specific passage, names of those who led despite being failures were included. Additionally, Deborah's story could have been left out of Scripture altogether but is readily available for anyone to see.

Anyway, as we wrap up tonight, lets recap a few main plot points:

1. God hears His people's prayers
2. Don't accept drinks from married women in their tents alone
3. Culture during Bible times was sexist, but the Bible isn't sexist

As we finish tonight, let's remember the story of Deborah as we try and live lives ourselves that may be turned into a musical some day!

[At this time, break for small groups or ask the small group questions in a larger group context, allowing for students to reflect on the main themes of the teaching.]