

Lesson 4: Judges 4-5 Deborah and Barak, Jael kills Sisera, Song of Deborah

In chapter 4 we see a prose account of a surprising woman. The story *is retold* in the form of a victory song or poem in Chapter 5. *The Song of Deborah* is thought to be one of the oldest preserved “literary pieces in all Holy Scripture.” (*Navarre Bible*). In this era women were rarely leaders of anything outside the home, according to anthropologists. Deborah, is not only a judge, but is also called a *prophetess*. Notice how, *through the power of God*, she commands the army. It is suggested that Deborah and Jael are two women who along with Sarah, Ruth, Esther, and Judith show the Lord’s intention to make women a part of salvation history. This sets the stage for Mary’s essential role in the New Testament.

1. Read Judges 4:1-3 and any footnotes in your bible.

Where do you see, in these verses, the themes of sin and punishment?

What is meant in vs 2; “the LORD *sold them* into the power of the Canaanite king, Jabin”?

Hint: consider that “selling them” is the *opposite* of “redeeming” them.

How might the Israelites “cry out to the Lord”? (vs. 3)

2. Read Judges 4:4-9 in your Bible.

What do we learn about Deborah in these verses?

Cite specific verses that illustrate the *respect* the Israelites had for Deborah.

Why *do you* think Barak wanted Deborah to go with him in vs 8?

What *do you* think Barak is most concerned about? See verse 3 and verses 7-8.

3. Read Judges 4:10-16 and skip ahead to *Judges 5:4-6 and 21*. (A Wadi is a river or stream.)

How did the Lord stop the chariots of the enemy?

What did Sisera do?

4. Read Judges 4:17- 23 and look back again at Deborah’s words in *Judges 4:9*.

(Point of interest: women were responsible for setting up the tents!)

Deborah had prophesied that the Lord would deliver Sisera into the hands of a *woman*. Who was the woman? How is she described in Judges 5:24?

5. Read Judges 5 in your bible, in its entirety, and Exodus 19:3-6 and 16-19 below.

Exodus 19:3-6 and 16-19 Moses went up to the mountain of God. Then the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying: This is what you will say to the house of Jacob; tell the Israelites: ⁴You have seen how I treated the Egyptians and how I bore you up on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now, if you obey

me completely and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession among all peoples, though all the earth is mine. ⁶You will be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. That is what you must tell the Israelites. On the morning of the third day there were peals of thunder and lightning, and a heavy cloud over the mountain, and a very loud blast of the shofar, so that all the people in the camp trembled. ¹⁷But Moses led the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stationed themselves at the foot of the mountain. ¹⁸Now Mount Sinai was completely enveloped in smoke, because the LORD had come down upon it in fire. The smoke rose from it as though from a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled violently. ¹⁹The blast of the shofar grew louder and louder, while Moses was speaking and God was answering him with thunder.

Who is the God of Sinai in Judges 5:5? How is God described in Exodus 19 above?

What does *Deborah's Song* say about God? Cite specific verses to share with your group.

6. Conditions were not good in Israel at this time. What conditions are being described in verses 6-8. (Hint: a lack of freedom outside of the walled cities was caused by bandits, but what else was going on?)
7. What is the “good news” that is spread in song, and who is listening to it in verses 10-11 and 31?
8. Read Judges 5: 12-18. Did all of the tribes participate in this great battle? Which tribes did not participate? Check footnotes for why this was the case.
9. What is the meaning of Judges 5:20?
10. Reflect on the image created in Judges 5:28-31.
After such a jubilant victory song, how are these verses empathetic or compassionate to those who lost the battle?

