

Deborah, the Judge



Scripture Reference: [Judges 4-5](#)

Suggested Theme: God works through women to do important things. We can respect and honor women who serve God.

Memory Verse: God works through women to do important things. We can respect and honor women who serve God.

Story Overview:

Deborah, the judge, held court while sitting beneath a palm tree. She was wise and helped the people solve their problems. She told Barak, commander of an army of Israel, that the Lord wanted him to fight an enemy named Sisera. Barak refused to fight unless Deborah accompanied him. She went along, and they defeated Sisera's army. During the battle, Sisera escaped and hid in the tent of a woman named Jael. During the night, Jael killed Sisera in his sleep. At the conclusion of the events, Deborah and Barak composed a song about women winning the victory.

Background Study:

[Click here for The Book of Judges: The Big Picture.](#)

Othniel was the first judge of Israel. Then Ehud, the second judge of Israel, led the people in driving out their enemies. When Ehud died, the people began to turn away from God again.

The Lord allowed Israel's enemy, Jabin, to defeat and rule over them. His home was at Hazor, north of the Sea of Galilee. The captain of his army, Sisera, lived at Harosheth on the Kishon River, about thirty-five miles away to the southwest.

It seems that Jabin's way of oppressing the people was to take most of their crops, sheep, and cattle. Jabin's iron chariots pulled by swift horses would simply run over anyone who tried to stop them. The people were suffering, and they turned to the Lord. They prayed to God for help.

True to the cycle of the times, the Lord sent a Judge to save the people - the prophetess, Deborah. Prophets were spokespeople. Other biblical mentions of women God chose to convey His special messages to others were:

- Miriam ([Exodus 15:20](#))
- Huldah ([2 Kings 22:14](#))
- Anna ([Luke 2:36](#)).

Since God told Deborah what to say, the people wisely went to her to have their quarrels settled. Deborah “held court under a palm tree.”

God told Deborah to have Barak gather and lead an army to Mount Tabor. That was near the home of Jabin’s captain, Sisera. God promised that Sisera would come to fight, but Barak would win. We can only guess the reasons for Barak’s hesitation. He might have been frightened. He might have wanted Deborah along to convey God’s instructions and would represent God on the battlefield. He may have wanted Deborah to be a moral boost for his army. Whatever his reasons, he agreed to go only if Deborah would accompany him. Deborah agreed to go along, but she pointed out that a man would lead in the battle, but a woman would get the credit for killing Sisera.

Zebulun and Naphtali were tribes of Israel living in the region near Jabin and Sisera. They probably suffered most from the oppression, and the army was raised from among them. At that time, the Canaanites had a technological edge over the Israelites. With their iron chariots, the Canaanites could control the plains. When Sisera heard about the Israelite army, he assembled his chariots and moved up the narrow plain beside the Kishon River to meet the opposition.

Again, the prophetess promised victory, and Barak led his troops down from Mount Tabor. Chapter 5 explains how the Lord defeated Sisera. He brought a big rain ([Judges 5:4-5](#)). Their heavy iron chariots bogged down in the mud. This effectively evened out the advantage that Sisera’s army had. Sisera himself left his chariot and ran away on foot. The enemy troops fled back down the valley toward Harosheth, but Barak’s men destroyed them before they could get inside the city walls.

Sisera ran in panic, trying to find refuge. There had been some friendly relations with the family of Jael, so he made his way to her tent. This woman invited Sisera into her tent and told him to sleep. She gave him a warm cover. When he asked for water, she gave him milk instead. All of this would have helped him sleep soundly. During the night, Jael used a hammer to drive a tent peg through his skull.

After the rest of Sisera’s army was defeated, Jael’s heroism was celebrated in song. Just as Deborah said, a woman did receive the credit!

Way to Introduce the Story:

Collect pictures from books, magazines, and newspapers that depict famous women. Discuss these with the children. Ask them to name women in the church who work for the Lord. “There are well-known women today but there were also women long ago who were well-known. We can read about one of these women in the book of Judges. Her name was Deborah.”

The Story:

The people of God had a land of their very own. It was called the land of Canaan. God’s people were called Israelites. Sometimes, enemies would try to hurt God’s people, but God promised to take care of them. The Lord promised to take care of His people as long as they obeyed Him. If they did not obey Him, then the Lord would allow Israel’s enemies to hurt them and win their land.

Sometimes, it seemed like the Israelites never learned a lesson. The same thing happened again and again. First, the Israelites would begin to leave God and disobey Him. Then, the Lord would let enemies win battles against them and treat them badly. When the people were suffering, they were sorry they had disobeyed God. They would pray to God to help them. Finally, the Lord would send someone to help the people and save them from their enemies. This person was called a JUDGE.

One famous judge was a woman. Her name was Deborah. Deborah was so wise that everyone wanted to listen to what she said. She used to sit under a palm tree and let people come and ask her advice. The Lord

knew that Deborah was a good woman. Deborah spoke the words that the Lord wanted her to. Sometimes, she would help people by telling them what the Lord wanted them to do.

It was good that Deborah talked to the people because they were very unhappy. Many people had stopped following God. Israel's enemies were very mean. One enemy, Jabin, had a big army that used to hurt the Israelites. The people were sorry that they were not obeying the Lord. They wanted Him to help them. Deborah asked the leader of Israel's army to come to her. His name was Barak. She told him that the Lord wanted him to go into battle and fight Jabin's army. Deborah told Barak that the Lord would help him and that he would win the battle.

Barak did not want to go alone. He knew the enemy had a very strong general in their army. The general's name was Sisera. Barak told Deborah he would not go to battle unless she went with him. Usually, women did not go to battle, but Deborah said she would help Barak. Deborah told Barak that because he needed a woman to help him, then a woman would defeat Sisera.

Barak gathered an army of 10,000 men. Sisera had a huge army and 900 iron chariots. When Deborah told Barak to begin the fight, the army rushed into a valley to fight against Sisera's army and all the strong chariots. Then, an amazing thing happened. Clouds gathered, and rain started to fall. So much rain fell that the valley flooded. All of the iron chariots got stuck in the mud! Sisera's army began to run away.

Sisera started running, too. He ran until he came to the tent of a woman named Jael. She invited the general of the enemy into her tent. Jael was tricking Sisera. When morning came, Barak came searching for Sisera so that he could capture him. Sisera was dead. It was just like Deborah had said: a woman defeated Sisera!

Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

[Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download these illustrations and slideshow.](#) Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story, while reflection questions encourage them to internalize its meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. [Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.](#)

Review:

1. What was the name of the woman judge? (Deborah)
2. Who was the general of the Israelites' army? (Barak)
3. Why did Deborah go with Barak into the battle? (He wouldn't fight without her)
4. How did the Israelites win against an army with 900 iron chariots? (God sent rain, the valley flooded, and the chariots got stuck in the mud)
5. Where did Sisera, the general of the enemy's army, hide? (In the tent of a woman named Jael)
6. Who killed Sisera? (A woman named Jael)

7. Why did God have judges in Israel? (God gave Israel judges to help His people stop their evil ways and follow Him again)
8. What was Deborah's job as a judge? (Deborah's job was to listen to God and tell the Israelites what God wanted them to hear or do. God's used Deborah to help the people follow Him)
9. What did you learn about God from this story?

Reflection:

1. During the battle between Israel and Sisera's army, it started pouring rain so much that the ground became muddy. What do you think this battle looked like with all this rain and mud?
2. Who are women you know that follow God like Deborah?
3. Who are women you know that are brave and wise like Deborah or Jael?
4. What is something you wonder about in this story?
5. How do you think Deborah felt when she went to battle with Barak and the Israelite army?
6. How do you think Sisera's army felt when their chariots got stuck in the mud during the battle?
7. After Israel won the battle, Jael and Deborah sang a song to celebrate how women led Israel to victory. What songs do you like to sing when you're happy or celebrating? (You could also have the children make up a melody that the women could have sung)
8. Deborah was wise and listened to what God was saying to her and to Israel. When you pray, do you spend time being quiet and listening to what God wants to say to you? (Try this together! Pray together and stay in silence for 15-30 seconds or longer if you would like. Encourage the children to think in their heads, "God, I'm listening." See if anyone hears from God.)

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a life-long friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. [A variety of prayer methods are found here.](#)

Song Suggestions:

- [I'm in the Lord's Army Song](#)
- [Books of the Old Testament Song](#)
- [Books of the Old Testament](#)
- [B-I-B-L-E](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

xxxxxxxxxxxxActivities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)

Activities:

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Crafts:

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Activities and Crafts:

- [How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.](#)
- [Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.](#)

Activities:

- Invite an active Christian woman (or women) to the gathering today. Ask her to describe the work she does for the Lord. Older children might interview these women.
- Brainstorm and list things women can do for the Lord and write them on the chalkboard/whiteboard.
- Send thank you notes to women who have helped the church in some way.
- Make sure there is some visual aid in your room that lists the books of the Old Testament. This could be a poster. Or write each book's name on large cards and blue-tac all of the cards to the wall in the correct order. This visual should last all term.
- Use the learning activity [Draw Out an Idea](#) to talk about the characters in this story.
- Make a miniature-size model of the story. If you teach over a number of weeks, you could add to the model to form a collection that reviews the stories. You can place the models in boxes. One box could display one judge. Ideas for a Deborah Box might be a palm tree or leaves, battle figures, a judge's gavel, weapons, a tent, or a container of milk.
- The time of the judges can be depicted as a repeating cycle. Try this simple idea to illustrate the idea of a cycle that goes round and round. The [Judges Review Wheel](#) explains the cycle of the Judges.



Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. [Free printables for this story.](#)

Crafts:

- Cut palm leaves from green paper and write review questions on them. As the children answer correctly, they can attach the leaves to a tree trunk.
- Make any palm tree craft (see links below for instructions).

- Draw a simple picture or outline and then fill it in with thoughts and ideas you have learned in the Bible story (photo at right).



Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. [Free printables for this story.](#)

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Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring page Deborah & puzzle worksheets \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Craft: Palm tree made from paper bag \(Kids Corner Home\)](#)
- [Craft: Coconut palm tree printable paper craft \(DLTK\)](#)
- [Craft: Painted footprint palm tree instructions and photos \(Crafty-Crafted\)](#)
- [Worksheet: Word search for books of the Old Testament \(Christian Answers\)](#)
- [Other: Chart of all judges & many activities for Deborah's story \(Sunday School Sources\)](#)
- [Other: Short play script that tells the story \(Kids Corner\)](#)

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Date

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