SESSION 2
DEBORAH: ENCOURAGING FAITH

The Point
Use your influence for God’s kingdom and for His honor.

The Passage
Judges 4:1-9; 5:1-5

The Bible Meets Life
“Someone sees leadership potential in you that you don’t see in yourself.” That was the best thing I could tell my daughter when she called home during her sophomore year of college. And I knew it from experience. During my own college years, I learned a lot about leadership. Being president of the women’s glee club and editor of the yearbook were just two things God used in my life to shape future leadership endeavors.

And now my own daughter needed to experience what others saw in her. She had been chosen to serve on a school leadership team. It was an honor to be asked, but she was hesitant about assuming more responsibilities. Others saw leadership potential in her, though, and they encouraged her to use it. I did too.

In the Book of Judges we find a woman who also encouraged others in leadership. God used Deborah to challenge and encourage Barak to step up and lead. Her example and faith led to a great moment in the life of Israel.

The Setting
The Book of Judges covers the time in Israel’s history from the settlement of Canaan and the death of Joshua through the time of Samuel. Deborah was the only woman among the twelve judges mentioned in this book. Deborah was both a prophetess who spoke for God and a judge who settled disputes. She used her influence for God’s kingdom and for His honor.
Judges 4:1-9; 5:1-5

4:1 The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD after Ehud had died. 2 So the LORD sold them to King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera who lived in Harosheth of the Nations. 3 Then the Israelites cried out to the LORD, because Jabin had nine hundred iron chariots, and he harshly oppressed them twenty years. 4 Deborah, a prophetess and the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. 5 She would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to settle disputes.

6 She summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, “Hasn’t the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you: ‘Go, deploy the troops on Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the Naphtalites and Zebulunites? 7 Then I will lure Sisera commander of Jabin’s army, his chariots, and his infantry at the Wadi Kishon to fight against you, and I will hand him over to you.’” 8 Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, I will go. But if you will not go with me, I will not go.” 9 “I will gladly go with you,” she said, “but you will receive no honor on the road you are about to take, because the LORD will sell Sisera to a woman.” So Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh.

5:1 On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang: 2 When the leaders lead in Israel, when the people volunteer, blessed be the LORD. 3 Listen, kings! Pay attention, princes! I will sing to the LORD; I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel. 4 LORD, when you came from Seir, when you marched from the fields of Edom, the earth trembled, the skies poured rain, and the clouds poured water. 5 The mountains melted before the LORD, even Sinai, before the LORD, the God of Israel.
GET INTO THE STUDY

LEADER PACK: Display Pack Item 2, the “Living by Faith Map,” to give context for some of the places that were important in the story of Deborah.

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 21 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): “Who do you know that’s good at influencing others?” Allow time for each person to respond.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, prepare to show a video clip from a movie or TV show that demonstrates the kind of leadership that influences others. Ask the group what made the leader’s words or actions so influential.

Note: A video option can be found at BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 22 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of influencing others for the Lord by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

LEADER PACK: Display Pack Item 3, the “Judges” poster to give context for where Deborah and Barak are in the line of Israel’s judges.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” on page 22 of the PSG: “Use your influence for God’s kingdom and for His honor.”

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking God to open our eyes to ways we can influence others for Him.
The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord after Ehud had died. So the Lord sold them to King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera who lived in Haroseth of the Nations. Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord, because Jabin had nine hundred iron chariots, and he harshly oppressed them twenty years.

Deborah, a prophetess and the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to settle disputes.

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Judges 4:1-5 on page 23 of the PSG.

**SUMMARIZE:** Highlight the main points from pages 23-24 of the PSG. Consider the names introduced in the first four verses:

- **Ehud.** Ehud was a left-handed judge from the tribe of Benjamin who led Israel during the eighteen years of oppression under Eglon, king of Moab (Judg. 3:14-30).

- **King Jabin.** Because of their unfaithfulness, God allowed the Israelites to fall under the rule of the oppressive King Jabin of Canaan. Those who lived in the northern part of the kingdom were especially impacted.

- **Sisera.** Sisera was the commander of Jabin’s army.

- **Deborah.** Deborah was the only female judge mentioned in the Book of Judges; men traditionally held this leadership role.

**GUIDE:** Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to explain the repeated cycle of disobedience we see in the Book of Judges.

**DISCUSS:** Question #2 on page 23 of the PSG: “What are your initial observations about Deborah?”

**TRANSITION:** We influence others when we live out our calling. In the next verses we also see that we can encourage others to live out their God-given tasks.
Judges 4:1-5 Commentary

[Verses 1-2] The Book of Judges describes Israel’s failure to follow God’s commands by completely conquering the Canaanites. This led to Israel’s worship of Canaanite gods and goddesses. We see also a pattern: the Lord raised up judges (2:16) but Israel refused to listen to them and followed other gods (v. 17). Judges 4–5 presents the story of Deborah and Barak in two distinct formats. Chapter 4 is narrative; chapter 5 is poetry. The story deals with the first major threat to Israel in the Book of Judges with the oppression and relief of six tribes. The opening words, **The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord**, are found repeatedly in Judges (2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). This repetition indicates the pervasive cycle of sin, oppression, repentance, deliverance, and obedience during this time of the judges. The writer explained that the Lord sold Israel to an oppressor, **to King Jabin of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor**. Elsewhere, Jabin is referred to as the King of Hazor (Josh. 11). Hazor was located in northern Israel and was the largest city of Canaan. **Sold** indicates Israel was Yahweh’s possession to discipline as needed to bring them back to Him. **Sisera**, who **lived in Harosheth of the Nations**, was the commander of King Jabin’s army. The word translated **Nations** here is also translated “Gentiles” and is a generic term for people.

[Verses 3-5] Then **the Israelites cried out to the Lord** reveals the repeated cycle of sin, judgment, oppression, repentance, rescue, and obedience so prominent in the Book of Judges. This verse gives two reasons for the Israelite’s distress. First, **King Jabin** had **nine hundred iron chariots** under his control. From a military standpoint, these iron chariots were vastly superior to Israel’s weapons (bows, spears, swords, etc.). However, Israel had Almighty God, the Lord of Hosts (armies) on their side. Second, Jabin **harshly** oppressed the Israelites for half a generation, **twenty years**. From verse 4, we know three things about **Deborah**. First, she was a **prophetess**; she spoke God’s message to Israel. Second, Deborah was also the **wife of Lappidoth**, a name that means “firey” or “torches.” Since biblical names represented a person’s character, this word may have described Deborah and her husband. Third, Deborah was **judging Israel** at that time. In ancient Israel, a judge was more than a legal authority. Usually men, judges exercised leadership in the areas of religious questions, political matters, legal disputes, and even, as we see in our next Scripture passage, military matters. Specifically, Deborah led Barak, the Israelite general, to “man up.” Deborah certainly used her influence for God’s kingdom and His honor. The Israelites went up to Deborah to **settle disputes** as she sat **under the palm tree of Deborah** in the **hill country of Ephraim** located between **Ramah and Bethel**. This central location provided Israel with a place they could come to receive God’s judgment from Deborah. The people of Israel knew who she was, what she did, and where they could find her. As she lived out her calling from God, she was able to influence others.
Judges 4:6-9

“She summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, “Hasn’t the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you: ‘Go, deploy the troops on Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the Naphtalites and Zebulunites? Then I will lure Sisera commander of Jabin’s army, his chariots, and his infantry at the Wadi Kishon to fight against you, and I will hand him over to you.’”

“He said to her, “If you will go with me, I will go. But if you will not go with me, I will not go.” “I will gladly go with you,” she said, “but you will receive no honor on the road you are about to take, because the LORD will sell Sisera to a woman.” So Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Judges 4:6-9 on page 24 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 25 of the PSG: “When has God used someone else to encourage you to step into a ministry opportunity?”

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from pages 24-25 of the PSG. We see Deborah’s confidence in the specific instructions she gave to Barak:

- **A specific place:** “Deploy the troops on Mount Tabor” (v. 6).
- **A specific number:** “Take with you ten thousand men” (v. 6).
- **A specific outcome:** “I will hand him over to you” (v. 7).

RECAP: Deborah didn’t abandon Barak. She “gladly” (CSB) went with him and gave him strength to accomplish God’s purpose, but not without one final prophetic word. The honor of the battle, she forewarned, would belong to a woman. At this point, we might assume that this honor would go to Deborah, but instead, it would go to a nomadic Gentile tent-dweller named Jael (Judg. 4:17). God often uses the most unlikely of people to fulfill His ultimate plan and purposes.

TRANSITION: In the next verses, we see that God is honored when we live out what He leads us to do.
Judges 4:6-9 Commentary

[Verse 6] Deborah summoned Barak; his name means “lightening.” He lived in Kedesh in Naphtali. Along with the tribe of Naphtali, the tribe of Zebulun came from the territory oppressed most by the Canaanites. Other Israelite tribes joined in the battle (Judg. 5). We see Deborah more in her role as prophetess than in her role as judge. Likely Deborah’s reputation resulted in people coming to her to explain the oppression suffered by these Israelite tribes. Deborah’s words “Hasn’t the Lord, the God of Israel, commanded you . . .” indicate God had already spoken to Barak. Deborah’s role as a prophetess was to declare God’s will to people. God’s words through Deborah helped encourage Barak to “man up,” to say yes to God and His message, though verse 8 reveals Barak’s reluctance remained a driving force for him. Deborah repeated God’s command: Go, deploy ten thousand troops from Naphtali and Zebulun at Mt. Tabor. This number of troops was a significant number for the tribes but likely a far lower number than the soldiers they faced. This reinforced the idea God and His power would provide victory.

[Verses 7-8] Lure points to God’s personal activity in bringing about victory. The size of King Jabin’s forces under General Sisera would have included both chariots and infantry. God specified where the battle would take place, the Wadi Kishon. Wadis were dry stream beds which usually flowed with water only during the rainy season. The end of verse 7 reveals God’s promise: I will hand him [Sisera] over to you. Perhaps more than any other verse in this section, verse 8 focuses on the truth that strong leadership is willing to let others lead when called upon, encouraging others to live out their God-given tasks. Barak told Deborah, “If you will go with me, I will go.” Giving Barak the benefit of doubt, perhaps Barak had recognized Deborah’s leadership in her role as prophetess and judge. Perhaps he was being a cautious military tactician. However, when we examine the remainder of the verse, Barak’s mindset becomes obvious: “But if you will not go with me, I will not go.” Deborah had encouraged Barak to live out his God-given tasks; nevertheless, Barak refused to go without her. Deborah had used her influence for God’s kingdom and His honor but Barak remained unconvinced.

[Verse 9] Deborah confidently announced her willingness to serve as a representative of God. She would gladly go with Barak. To see God’s representative going with them likely gave encouragement to Barak and his troops. Yet in what must have been a disappointment to Barak, Deborah added: “But you will receive no honor . . . because the Lord will sell Sisera to a woman.” Likely Barak thought this woman deliverer would be Deborah; we know from verses 17-22 the woman was Jael. So Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh reflects more than Deborah’s following through on her promise. At this point in other Old Testament calls from God to Moses, Gideon, Jeremiah, and others, God frequently promised His presence. Deborah’s action here assured Barak of God’s promised presence.
Judges 5:1-5

1 On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang: 2 When the leaders lead in Israel, when the people volunteer, blessed be the L ORD. 3 Listen, kings! Pay attention, princes! I will sing to the L ORD; I will sing praise to the L ORD God of Israel. 4 L ORD, when you came from Seir, when you marched from the fields of Edom, the earth trembled, the skies poured rain, and the clouds poured water. 5 The mountains melted before the L ORD, even Sinai, before the L ORD, the God of Israel.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Judges 5:1-5 on page 26 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 26 of the PSG: “In what ways can we be an influence for God in the places where we live, work, attend school, or volunteer?”

RECAP: We read in Judges 5:2 that God is blessed when godly leaders lead and people freely and willingly step up to be used by God. God was praised as the creator of everything and His purposes will not be overcome. The Israelites were victorious over the Canaanites, who were known for worshiping Baal, the god of the storm. But when “the L ORD God of Israel” stepped in, “The earth trembled, the skies poured rain, and the clouds poured water. The mountains melted before the L ORD.” Clearly, the false god of the storm was no match for the Lord of the universe.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 26 of the PSG: “How can our group use our influence to further God’s kingdom?”

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity, “Influencing Others” on page 27 of the PSG to help them.

Choose the image of a person influencing others that most inspires you. [PSG shows four images from which to choose.] Then answer the questions.

GUIDE: Refer back to “The Point” for this session: “Use your influence for God’s kingdom and for His honor.”
Judges 5:1-5 Commentary

[Verse 1] Our focus in Judges 5:1-5 is that God is honored when we live out what He leads us to do. Deborah's primary aim was to express praise for what God had done in defeating Sisera and his army. This poem could be titled “A Hymn of Praise to Yahweh.” The Lord caused the victory (vv. 4-5) and the praise is directed toward Him (v. 3). Deborah is often identified as the writer of this song/poem. Verse 1 reveals that Deborah both composed this victory song and sang it on that day, the day the Lord gave Israel victory over Sisera and the Canaanites. That Deborah is mentioned prior to Barak downplays his role. This may be due to Barak's reluctance to follow God's call (Judg. 4:6,8).

[Verses 2-3] Though it appears last in the verse, the main part of this verse is blessed be the Lord. This use of God's covenant name, Yahweh—six times in these five verses—reveals the song's focus. Old Testament scholar Daniel Block wrote “when someone lesser ‘blesses’ a superior, it means ‘to acknowledge that person as the source of special power/benefactions.’” In this case “bless the Lord” means to praise Him. The two phrases that begin when are problematic to translate. Hebrew poetry sometimes uses multiple words with similar meanings; this makes translation difficult. Further, some words used in poetry are little known so the meaning may be unclear. The word when followed by an infinitive, as here, can be translated “given this fact.” The two phrases, when the leaders lead in Israel and when the people volunteer are parallel, suggesting both leaders and people should praise the Lord for His actions. Leaders refers to Deborah first, Barak second; the people may refer not only to the Israelite army but perhaps to all Israel, particularly those whom God had freed from oppression. Both kings and princes (or rulers) are asked to listen and pay attention. Since Israel did not yet have kings and princes, these words address other nations. Likely Deborah's goal was to influence them by telling them of God's kingdom and His honor. The parallelism continues. Sing and sing praise are parallel as are Lord and Lord God of Israel with the second line more fully explaining the first line.

[Verses 4-5] Instead of talking about the Lord, verse 4 addresses Him, pointing out Israel's reasons to praise Him. Again, the clauses regarding Seir and Edom are in parallel form. Additionally, the reference to Sinai in verse 5 adds to this parallelism. Israel went from a group of former slaves to a nation in covenant with God at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19). Judges 5:4-5 traces Israel's covenant relationship with God from Sinai, through Seir, into Edom. Deborah's recounting of Israel's journey into Canaan was likely for the benefit of surrounding kings. Deborah offered other parallels. First, the earth trembled and the mountains melted. Next, the skies poured rain, and the clouds poured water. God's actions pointed to His superiority over the Canaanite god, Baal. This song demonstrates that God is honored when we live out what He leads us to do. God desires His people to use their influence for God's kingdom and His honor.


Read the article “It Happened at Mount Tabor” in the Summer 2019 issue of Biblical Illustrator.” Other articles that relate to this lesson can be purchased at www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator. Look for Bundles: Bible Studies for Life.
GUIDE: Direct group members to page 28 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications to carry out this week.

- **Thank someone.** Send a note of thanks to someone who has been an influence in your life. Encourage the encourager!

- **Praise.** Follow the example of Judges 5. Look at how God has worked in your life and praise Him. Use time in your car as a time for listening to praise music. Make your commute one of praise and worship.

- **Embrace the call.** Consider how God may be calling you to lead in a specific ministry assignment. Find a godly person to counsel you. Or be that person, the one who encourages someone else to embrace God’s call in his or her life.

**Wrap It Up**

**TRANSITION:** Read or restate the final paragraph from page 28 of the PSG:

My daughter stepped up to her new role as a leader—and she is still leading. A little encouragement is all it took, and now she is encouraging others. God can use you to influence others as well and to give Him praise.

**PRAY:** Conclude by asking God to give us eyes to see those He has sent across our paths to influence for Him. Thank Him for those who did the same for us.

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