

{un}faithful - 4
Week of February 26, 2017
Bay Park Life Groups – Leader’s Guide

Deborah’s story is a fascinating one. Consider this:

- Deborah was a well-rounded leader, not just a commander. The people came to her and trusted her discernment as she wisely directed them in everyday matters of life.
- Deborah restored social, community and village life at a time when the people were fractured and afraid.
- Deborah was a poet-musician. Her song is considered by many scholars as one of the great artistic works of the ancient world. Up to this point in Israel’s history only Moses had the honour of having a song he wrote recorded in God’s Word (Deuteronomy 32).

This is just the tip of the iceberg - there’s so much more for you to discover!

Read Judges 4:1-16

1. How is Deborah like Ehud? How is she different?

Like:

- *Like Ehud, the Spirit of God was upon her (3:7, 28 vs 4:6, 14).*
- *Like Ehud Deborah is an unexpected, paradigm-busting deliverer. At the time, women were not usually rulers, even less the leader of a rebel movement. The book of Judges itself foreshadows the greatest and most unexpected deliverer of all, Jesus Christ.*

Unlike:

- *The Spirit of God gave Ehud courage to stand and face Eglon alone. In Deborah’s case the Spirit moved her to prophesy and to mobilize others.*
- *Of all the twelve deliverers recorded in Judges, only Deborah is depicted as wise, influential, and godly. Othniel comes close, but even his description isn’t as glowing or as detailed as that of Deborah’s.*
- *Unlike all the other judges, Deborah led by her wisdom and not as a warrior. Though she accompanied Barak to the battlefield that was not her original intention.*
- *Deborah’s the only deliverer who filled the role of judge in a contemporary sense (4:5), while also being artistic (5:1-31).*
- *Deborah doesn’t lead or save alone. Her honour is shared with Barak (who she recruited) and Jael (a foreigner caught in the middle). cf 4:9, 5:1-24*

2. The Israelites were forced into the hill country to avoid Sisera’s chariots. 10 000 men against 900 steel chariots is like 10 000 blades of grass against a lawn mower. Look over the different translations of Judges 4:9 below. Was Barak’s request to have Deborah go with him rooted in fear or faith? Put another way; was Deborah’s prophecy of Jael’s victory a punishment for Barak’s cowardice or a heads up given his courage?

“Very well,” she replied, “I will go with you. But you will receive no honor in this venture, for the Lord’s victory over Sisera will be at the hands of a woman.” NLT

“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.” NIV

And she said, “I will surely go with you. Nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.” ESV

To help you answer the question for yourself, and to prepare you to lead an insightful discussion, I’ve included two well-articulated opposing views.

J D Greear:

It is an interesting exception to the formula of Judges that Deborah is a judge, but Barak is the one commanded to bring deliverance. Why is this the exception in the book? Look at how Deborah speaks to Barak: “Has not the LORD, the God of Israel, commanded you, ‘Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking 10,000 from the people of Naphtali and the people of Zebulun’” (Judges 4:6b). The question may imply that Barak has already been commanded by God to deliver Israel, or it could be that she mediates the command of God to Barak in this moment.

He responds by saying, “If you go, I’ll go; if not, I’m not going.” Deborah agrees to go with him but says that this will result in Barak forfeiting the glory of the victory to a woman. Barak, understandably, lets fear make him hesitate in carrying out God’s commands. He wants extra assurance that God will be with him in battle by asking God’s prophet to accompany him. Barak’s weakness foreshadows the descent of the rest of the judges to come. Barak’s hesitation in obedience to God turns into Gideon’s constant need for reassurance, which gives way to outright disregard for following God’s commands only a few generations later.¹

Tim Keller:

Judges 4:9 can also be translated as the NIV footnote says: “But on the expedition you are taking, the honor will not be yours.” Here’s why that rendering is more likely. First, why would Barak’s desire to take Deborah with him constitute disobedience? When Moses is given the same command to go forth, he says to God, “Not unless you go with me.” God’s response is identical to Deborah’s: “I will go with you.” (See Exodus 33:12-17.) We have seen how godly and anointed Deborah was. Why would it be disobedient for Barak to want such a godly woman with him? Second (and this is telling), Hebrews 11:32 lists Barak as a great hero who “through faith conquered kingdoms . . . and routed foreign armies.” That is quite significant. Barak is put in the same sentence with Gideon, Samson, and Jephthah. We are told that his victory was done in great faith. Notice that Deborah is not named in this list. It was a greater act of faith on Barak’s part than Deborah’s! So in the New Testament we learn that Barak demonstrated great faith in asking for Deborah’s presence and help. He went into a battle knowing that he would not get all the honor—that one woman would begin the campaign and another woman would end it.²

¹ J D Greear, Broken Saviours Study Guide, (The Summit Church) p 19

² Tim Keller, *Living in a Pluralistic Society*, (Redeemer Church, 2009) p 32

Read 4:17-23

3. God used a prophetess, a general and a foreign bystander to bring about deliverance. How has teamwork grown your faith and what can you do to help others in God's mission?

You might consider getting someone to read Galatians 6:2 and 1 Peter 4:10.

4. Read Judges 5:24-31. What insight does Deborah's song give into Jael's possible motives for killing Sisera? How does this match up with her methods?

The word "girl" (NIV 5:30) is better translated as "wench" or "girlslave." It's clear from Deborah's song that Sisera's campaigns usually ended with theft, rape and sex slaves. Sisera would have had a reputation, one that instilled terror in many a woman. Jael likely knew of the grief and shame that Sisera and his men had imposed on many a family and their daughters. Ironically, Jael's own husband was one of Sisera's political allies. Jael's disgust for Sisera was greater than any concern she had for her husband and the alliance they had with the Canaanites. It is possible that Jael simply discerned that God was at work in the unfolding events, but the method used to kill Sisera seems to suggest some deep-seated loathing.

There's another irony in the story. Tent setting up and taking down was considered domestic work - a woman's work. The hammer and tent peg would have been everyday household tools for Jael. The fact that Sisera died at her hands rings a note of poetic justice given his treatment of women. That being said, the end does not justify the means. Jael broke more than just Middle Eastern hospitality rules that day. Whether or not you consider her actions murderous, they were at a minimum deceitful. So though her motives might be understandable, her methods are not to be imitated. This is especially true for post crucifixion, cross and resurrection believers as we are called to love our enemies.

Read 5:1-23

5. Deborah's song is more than just poetic interlude. List the ways in which her song adds to the lessons learned from this episode of Israel's history.
 - *The glory belongs to God (5:1-5, 20-21, 31).*
 - *Giving God all the glory also includes honouring those he used (5:8-9, 13-15, 18).*
 - *God exploited the chariots one weakness by sending rain/water, thus turning the odds in Israel's favour (5:21-22).*
 - *God doesn't need our help but chooses to allow us to help (5:23).*
 - *Even when God has clearly called and is at work, you can expect many to opt out for all kinds of sad excuses. (5:15b-17).*
 - *The joy, honour and celebration belongs to those who joined the mission, not to those who watched the mission (5:23).*
 - *God didn't just use the Israelites, he also used an outsider, a foreigner (5:24).*
6. What insights does 5:15b-17 give us into the reasons some chose to opt out of God's mission? What were the consequences of their choices?

7. Consider what it must have been like for everyday farmers and merchants to leave their families to join Barak and fight for freedom. For 20 years Sisera's superior army and technology had oppressed them. Think of the fears and excuses they had to overcome. Think of the glory that was theirs. What does their example inspire you to be reaching for in your life these days?