

ROCKPOINTE CHURCH SMALL GROUPS • Judges and Kings •

Judges 4–5 • Fall 2019 Kings and Judges Series

Main Point

True leaders are available to God and to others all the while trusting that God is in control.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Think of courageous people who have inspired others to take a stand in their day.

What are reasons, good or bad, that a person might resist taking on a leadership role?

After the deaths of Joshua and the generation of leaders who had seen the Lord's great acts, a new generation of Israelites arose who did not know the Lord and did not remember His works. They disobeyed the Lord and abandoned the covenant. Consequently, they faced His judgment in terms of defeat and oppression by other people groups. But when the Israelites cried out to God for help, he sent them rescue through the judges, spiritual and political leaders who led the nation until they demanded a king. Deborah was the fourth, and the only female, judge of Israel.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have a volunteer read Judges 4:1-7.

What do we learn about Deborah and her leadership roles from these verses?

One of the traits Deborah modeled as a leader was courage. What factors might have made Deborah's decision to become a leader especially courageous?

Deborah functioned in two roles—as a political leader and a spiritual leader.

What similarities exist between political leadership and spiritual leadership?

What are key differences between political leadership and spiritual leadership?

The text describes Deborah as a woman, a wife, a prophet, and a judge in Israel. As a prophet she was God's spokesperson to deliver His messages to the Israelites. But Deborah had the courage to serve God in a way unlike anyone else among her people. Because the hand of God was on her life, Deborah could render justly and fairly in matters that came before her. Deborah also was a spiritual leader. She served as God's spiritual spokesperson to Barak, who was Israel's military leader.

Why did the Israelites cry out to the Lord for help?

What did Deborah remind Barak about? What did she command him to do?

What did the Lord say He would do?

In time, the Lord's punishment of His people through oppression had its desired effect. The Israelites cried out to the Lord. God led Deborah to tell Barak to muster an army at Mount Tabor. God planned to draw Sisera and his chariots against Barak in the low ground of the Kishon. Then He would bring a heavy rain to flood the Wadi Kishon, causing Sisera's chariots and horses to get stuck in the mud and become useless.

Discuss how Deborah's clear goals and succinct directions provided an opportunity to encourage Barak. What are some reasons why people might refuse to listen to the Lord as He tells them to do something?

Why do we sometimes need others to encourage us to listen to God?

| Have a volunteer read Judges 4:8-14.

**What difference did Deborah's presence make for Barak and the army (v. 10)?
What additional insight does this give us into her leadership?**

Read Matthew 20:26-28. How do these verses imply that a leader must voluntarily or willfully serve? How do they imply that a leader is also a slave or someone who is obligated to serve?

Deborah knew that Barak was the man God wanted to lead the Israelites against their enemy. Barak needed encouragement to take on that leadership role, and Deborah didn't hesitate in giving it by stating that she would indeed go with him (see 4:9). Deborah focused on what God commanded Barak to do. She had faith in God's command and was willing to support His instructions in every way she could.

| Have a volunteer read Judges 5:1-11.

Why do you think it is important to celebrate victories God gives to you? What

do we communicate to Him by doing so?

What specific things do you learn about God in Deborah and Barak's praise?

What do these verses reveal about Deborah and Barak as leaders?

Deborah and Barak together led the people in a song of celebration and thanksgiving that focused on the Lord as the central character, while not ignoring the heroism of the human participants. Deborah highlighted the lack of leadership at this time. Only when Deborah arose did things begin to change. She became a mother in Israel, a title that expresses the respect with which she was viewed as a prophetess and leader.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What quality of Deborah's would you most like to have?

What are some ways in your own life that courage is needed to take a stand for God?

Read Romans 12:1. How did Deborah model this passage?

Based on Romans 12:1, how are we to present our bodies to God? How can these steps become faith steps for you today? What makes following through so difficult?

Pray

Close in prayer, thanking God for the spiritual leaders He has placed in our lives and in our church. Pray for the courage to be a godly leader in the areas of influence God has given you. Lastly, pray that you will be people who take the time to encourage the leaders in your lives as they strive to be godly leaders, too.

Commentary

| Judges 4:1-14

4:1-3. A new cycle is introduced with the standard formula of Israelite rebellion (cp. 3:7,12). In this instance the enemy was Jabin, a Canaanite king from Hazor, in the north of Israel. An earlier Jabin had been defeated by Joshua at Hazor about a century earlier (Josh. 11:1-15); this suggests that Jabin may have been a dynastic name. Hazor was destroyed by Joshua, but as was the case with Jerusalem in Judges 1:8, the destruction did not prevent some form

of reoccupation at a later date. Israel's failure to complete the occupation of the land once again came back to haunt them. The source of Jabin's strength, humanly speaking, lay in his 900 iron chariots. These gave him an enormous technological edge over the Israelites on flat ground. But his real power over Israel lay in the fact that the Lord, seeking to punish His people, had sold them into his hand.

4:4-5. Given their patriarchal culture, it is a measure of the poor state to which Israel had been reduced that they were being judged by a woman—a point emphasized in the Hebrew text, which piles up four feminine nouns at the beginning of the sentence (Deborah, a woman, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth). She could be found seated under the palm tree of Deborah, a location that may reflect a connection with her earlier namesake, Rebekah's nurse (Gen. 35:8).

4:6-7. As God's appointed representative, Deborah summoned Barak to take the lead in the fighting. She also gave him the Lord's plan of battle, deploying 10,000 men of Naphtali and Zebulun on Mount Tabor, a strategic location at the northeast corner of the Jezreel Valley. Further, she assured him of the Lord's victory over Israel's enemies.

4:8-10. Although Barak's name means "lightning," his response was slow. Deborah agreed to accompany him to Kedesh as a sign that the Lord was indeed with him, and he successfully raised an army of 10,000 men. As the story unfolds, the men will have less to do with the victory than a single woman.

4:11. What seems at first sight to be an irrelevant note introduces the key character in what follows. Heber the Kenite was one of those Kenites descended from Moses' father-in-law, who were mentioned in 1:16 as settling among the people. In keeping with the prominent role of women in this chapter, the key character is not Heber, whom we never meet, but his wife Jael, who has not yet been mentioned.

4:12-14. Sisera responded to Barak's movements by summoning his entire force of 900 iron chariots to the Wadi Kishon, the exact place where the Lord had earlier promised to lure him. This was the signal for Israel to prepare for action, a call that significantly came from Deborah rather than Barak. Barak responded to the Lord's call and found that the Lord had gone in front of him, just as He had done with the Egyptian forces at the time of the exodus (Ex 14:24). All that was left for Barak to do was the mopping-up operation.

| Judges 5:1-11

5:1. When God intervenes decisively in the lives of His people, their response is to sing His praise (Ex 15). Here Deborah and Barak together led the people in a song of celebration and

thanksgiving that focused on the Lord as the central character, while not ignoring the heroism of the human participants.

5:4-5. Deborah described the Lord's presence in the battle in the form of a theophany in which the Lord marched out from Mount Seir in Edom, bringing a mighty rainstorm. This storm not only served the practical function of bogging down Sisera's chariots and neutralizing his technological edge, it also depicts the Lord—not Baal—as the true God of the storm who marches out from His mountain home with the clouds and rain. The Lord alone controls the cosmic elements.

5:6. The state of Israel before the battle is graphically evoked. By calling these the days of Shamgar son of Anath and the days of Jael, Deborah highlighted the lack of leadership at this time. The Lord had to use two foreigners to rescue His people, including one whose name celebrates a pagan goddess. In those days the main ways were deserted, either because of fear of attack by bandits or excessive tolls imposed by the Canaanites, pushing what traffic there was onto the hidden trails that only local people knew about.

5:7-8. Life in the unwallled villages became impossible, so they were deserted. Only when Deborah arose did things begin to change. She became a mother in Israel, a title that not only expresses the respect with which she was viewed as a prophetess, but also highlights her femininity and the absence of a similar male figure as "father" at this time. The reason for this negative set of circumstances was simple: Israel had chosen new gods.

5:9-11. Deborah renewed her call to praise the Lord, this time addressing the rich Canaanite merchants, who travel on the road on which the Israelites were afraid to walk. These men were summoned to join the ordinary Israelites in celebrating the righteous acts of the Lord and of His warriors at the locale for conversation and the sharing of news, the watering places. These acts are righteous in the sense that the victory over Sisera vindicated the Lord's power and validated Israel as His chosen people.