

Our Bible Sisters:

Deborah – Responding to God’s Call

Leader’s Guide

This Bible study was written by Marilyn Miller, a staff minister at Abiding Word Lutheran Church in Houston, TX. The theological content was reviewed by Professor Lyle Lange.

Our Bible Sisters is a series of one-hour studies that may be used separately or in any combination. Each looks at a different woman of the Bible, highlighting God’s faithfulness in her life, with applications to the lives of all Christian women today.

Deborah – Responding to God’s Call

Opening Prayer

“God is faithful! Even in the dismal 350 year period of the Judges, when Israel was pulling away from God, he remained faithful to them. During Joshua’s time Israel saw victory after victory, but in the period of the judges they saw defeat after defeat. God used their trials to call them back to himself. He would always faithfully provide a deliverer.” (Barber, pg 53).

The Setting

1. Scan Judges 2:1–3:6. What cycle do you see during the period of the judges?

2:11-13 – (Apostasy) The people fell away from God and did evil, 2:14-15 – (Oppression) God chastened them by letting other nations defeat them, 2:16– (Deliverance) They cried out for help, God sent someone to rescue them, 2:18 – (Rest) the people enjoyed a period of peace and recovery. And then the cycle repeated itself once the judge died.

2. Read Judges 5:6-8 and 21:25. What was the land of Israel like at the time of Deborah?

Travel was dangerous and travelers had to go around the most dangerous places. “Village life ceased” - no one could even live outside the city gates any longer. The people worshipped pagan gods and then war came but the Israelites were defenseless and without weapons. Deborah lived at a time when there was no royal leader and the head of each family was responsible for faithfulness to God and to the nation. Obviously this faithfulness and national unity was quite broken. They were in deep trouble and had no place to look for help but to God. “Everyone did as he saw fit.”

3. Many of us may have experienced such desperate times in our life or in the life of someone we love. Why would God allow such a horrible situation in our life?

Too often, if we can figure our way out of our problems, we continue to rely upon ourselves and don’t look to God. At times we might not be in such deep trouble if we had been looking to God all along. Could it be that God has delivered us into the hands of trials to get us to the place where we will cry out to him, to turn from our ways back to lives that reflect his grace? This is one of the ways God teaches us.

4. What valuable life lesson do we learn from verse 7?

God knows when enough is enough; he knows how much we can take and then he provides a way out of our troubles. He knows the type of consequence to put in our lives when we sin; he brings us to the point of broken-ness and repentance, and then in his mercy, delivers us. He does all of this because he is faithful to his promise to preserve us!!

Deborah’s Life

5. Read Judges 4:4-5. Besides being a mother in Israel (Judges 5:7), what else do we learn about Deborah?

1) She was a woman through whom God could speak – she was open and receptive to what God wanted to say and she relayed it to the people just as God wanted her to. A prophetess (a female prophet) is a

person who receives direct revelation from God about some truth which would otherwise not have been known. A prophet proclaimed God's will to the people, sometimes about the future, but many times about what God had already revealed. 2) She was married to Lappidoth. 3) She was a judge of Israel and people came to her to settle their disputes. A judge was a secular government position, not a spiritual position. Note that "leading" in vs 4 means "judging". 4) God equipped Deborah with the gifts needed to fulfill his purpose in the calling he gave to her along with the respect of God's people. 5) She was a poet, having written the song of chapter 5.

6. Read Judges 4:6-10. What do we learn about the plan for deliverance from Sisera's army?

It was GOD's plan, not Deborah's. She very clearly gave God the credit for the plan and made herself nothing more than a messenger. She relayed exactly what God had said even if a military strategist would consider the plan to be greatly flawed – the Israelites had no weapons and yet they were being told to go to war against 10 times more men equipped with 900 iron chariots. She simply trusted that God would be true to his word and deliver the enemy into their hands.

7. Why might Barak have responded as he did in vs 8 and what can we learn from this?

He was most likely afraid but he may also have wanted to be sure God, through Deborah, would be with him as he took on such a formidable task. Following God's commands isn't getting "the word" once and then acting on it, but rather continually seeking God every step of the way. Barak took his eyes off the God who would provide, and instead focused on his weakness.

The Lesson For Us

8. What can we learn about God's calling of men and women from Deborah's response to Barak in vs 9-10 and 14?

Male leadership at this time was desperately weak as we can see from the state of the religious and national faithfulness (question 2 discussion). She didn't lead the troops into battle but rather was God's mouthpiece, prodding Barak to do what was needed. She didn't try to diminish or usurp Barak's position of leadership but rather conveyed God's command without hesitation, showing her strength of character, faithfulness and insight, reminding him of God's promise to be with him. She complemented Barak and helped him carry out his duty and God's will. Today this same situation may happen in families or in congregations. God created and specified a divine order but he also created men and women to complement one another. God's plans will be carried out; if the person who is intended to do the work does not, then God will raise up someone else to accomplish his will. God, speaking through Deborah, made sure that Barak understood no man would get the glory for this victory. By giving the glory to a peasant woman, everyone would know the victory was God's alone. This should be our ultimate goal in all that we do.

The rest of the story: God caused a heavy rain and the enemy army was caught in a great flood. As the chariots got bogged down, the army ran and the Israelites killed them. Sisera stopped at the camp of a friend to rest. Jael, the wife of the friend, drove a stake through his head as he slept. This humiliating death began a cycle of peace and rest for the Israelites. (Judges 4:15-24, 5:4,20-22)

9. Is there or has there been something in your life that feels like 900 iron chariots standing in wait to destroy you?

If Deborah were here, what advice might she give you about:

- Our attitude in times of trial?

All power and wisdom comes from God. We can't figure things out on our own. He will resolve all conflicts and difficulties in his time and in his way and to his glory. The victory is his alone. Whatever the situation is, God is bigger than the situation. Our energy is better spent in prayer, seeking his will, trusting in him.

- Being prepared to respond?

Be faithful in everyday life so that we are available to God when he wishes to use us and we are able to see the opportunities he puts in front of us. Don't just know his Word in your head, but have it deep in your heart. Hone the skills that God has given you and use them to his glory. Deborah was respected because of her faithfulness, her wisdom, her wise counsel and her attitude of "thus says the Lord". She was ready and willing to respond to God's plan for her.

- Responding to his call?

Trust God completely so that we don't question or try to make sense of his messages to us but simply follow his lead. Realize that God doesn't need our help but longs for our trust and obedience. Deborah didn't hesitate to say or do exactly as God told her. It didn't occur to her that it wouldn't make sense to the logistical experts of her day. It was God's plan and that was enough

10. As a New Testament believer, what are some practical applications of this advice?

Doing regular Bible study; asking for God to be active in our life and lead us; at the cross seeing our need for a Savior and the blessing of his grace; being active in the world/church so that we see and take advantage of opportunities to hone new skills and help God's people; teaching our children to put God first ...

Additional Scripture to study: Read Ephesians 6:10-18 (the full armor of God), Psalm 32:5 (confession of sins) 1 John 2:5-6 (obedience to God's Word), Hebrews 13:15-16 (confessing Jesus)

11. Do you see any evidence in your own life of the "sin cycle" we see in Judges? Do you tend to wander and take your relationship with God seriously only when he sends chastening circumstances your way?

Knowing that God will remain faithful, but his will is for us to be faithful servants; standing ready to serve him in any way he desires. He is not pleased when we do things as we see fit (Judges 21:25) Nevertheless he forgives us our many sins, wants to help us turn away from our evil ways, and gives us strength to live lives of thankful praise. In his mighty power, he has already won the victory for us as surely as he delivered the Israelites through Deborah and Barak. Read 1 Corinthians 15:56-58 (Jesus gives us the victory. Stand firm.)

Closing Prayer/Meditation

I Hear the Savior Calling, CW 560, vs. 3

*I hear the Savior calling!
The gospel comes to me.
My eyes once closed in blindness
Are opened now to see
That I myself was helpless
To live eternally,
But, dying, Christ did save me,
And now he calls for me!*

Some thoughts for personal/group prayer:

Thank you for loving and caring for me.
Make me sensitive to your chastening hand.
Help me run to you, not from you
Empower me to be faithful and obedient, ready to follow your calling

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